THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

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The Rainbow Bridge

BOOKS BY
FRANCES MARGARET FOX

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MRS. MOORE ROCKED A BABY BEFORE THE NURSERY FIRE.

The Rainbow Bridge

A Story

By

FRANCES MARGARET FOX

Author of "What Gladys Saw," "Farmer Brown and the Birds," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

FRANK T. MERRILL

W. A. WILDE COMPANY

BOSTON CHICAGO

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The Rainbow Bridge

To
the dear friend of my childhood
and later years
Mrs. William W. Crouch

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The Rainbow Bridge

CHAPTER I

A LITTLE PILGRIM BEGINS A JOURNEY

THERE was always room for one more in the Home for Little Pilgrims. Especially was this true of the nursery; not because the nursery was so large, nor because there was the least danger that the calico cats might be lonesome, but Mrs. Moore loved babies. It made no difference to her whether the wee strangers were white or black, bright or stupid, she treated them all alike. They were dressed, undressed, bathed, fed and put to sleep at exactly the same hours every day, that is, they were laid in their cribs whenever it was time for them to go to sleep. Little Pilgrims were never rocked and Mrs. Moore had no time for lullaby songs, whatever may have been her inclination.

Yet there came a night when Mrs. Moore rocked a baby before the nursery fire and sung to it all the songs she knew. That was the night Marian Lee entered the Home with bright eyes wide open. She not only had her eyes open when she was placed in Mrs. Moore's arms, but she kept them open and somehow compelled Mrs. Moore to break her own rules and do as she had never done with a new baby.

To be sure, Marian Lee couldn't talk, having started on her pilgrimage only six months before, but in a way of her own, she declared herself well pleased with the Home and with the nursery in particular. She enjoyed her bath and said so. The warm fire in the grate pleased her and Mrs. Moore's face was lovely, if a baby's ideas were of any account. The trouble began when Marian was carried into the still room where the sleeping Pilgrims were, and placed in a crib. The minute her head touched the pillow she began to cry. When Mrs. Moore left her, she cried louder. That awakened tiny Joe in the nearest crib and when he began to wail, Bennie and

Johnnie, Sam and Katie, as well as half a dozen others joined in the chorus. Not to be outdone by these older Pilgrims, Marian screamed louder than any of them until Mrs. Moore took her back to the fire and quiet was restored.

Now it was strictly against Mrs. Moore's rules to humor a baby in that fashion, and Mrs. Moore told Marian so, although she added in the next breath, "Poor little dear." The "poor little dear" was cooing once more and there really seemed nothing to do but kiss, and cuddle and rock the baby as her own mother might have done. She was so unlike the others in the Home; so soft, round and beautiful.

"You are no ordinary baby, precious one," said Mrs. Moore, whereupon Marian laughed, flourished her hands and seemed much pleased. "I think," continued Mrs. Moore, as she kissed the pink fists, "I think some one has talked to you a great deal. My babies are different, poor little things, they don't talk back as you do."

Before long, the rows of white cribs in the

other room were forgotten and Mrs. Moore began singing to Marian as though she were the only baby in the big Home. Lullaby after lullaby she sang while the fire burned low, yet the baby would not sleep. Softly at last, Mrs. Moore began a lullaby long unsung:

"All the little birdies have gone to sleep,
Why does my pet so wide awake keep?
Peep, peep, go to sleep, peep, peep, go to sleep.

"All the little babies their prayers have said,
Their mothers have tucked them up snugly in bed.
Peep, peep, go to sleep, peep, peep, go to sleep."

When the blue eyes closed, Mrs. Moore suddenly realized it was but another Little Pilgrim that she held and not her own baby so often hushed to sleep by that old lullaby many years ago. For the sake of that baby, Mrs. Moore had loved all the motherless little ones in the Home—all the unfortunate, neglected waifs brought to its doors. She had loved them impartially until that night. She had never before asked who a baby was, nor what its surroundings had been. Its future

was her only concern. To care for each baby while it was in the nursery and to be sure it was placed in a good home when taken away, was all she wished to know. No baby had ever crept into Mrs. Moore's innermost heart as Marian did that night. An hour later the superintendent was surprised when Mrs. Moore asked for the history of that latest Little Pilgrim.

"She's a fine child," mused the superintendent, adding cheerfully, "we'll have no trouble finding a home for her; I doubt if she's here a month."

Mrs. Moore said nothing but she was sure Marian would stay more than a month. After she heard the superintendent's story, she was more sure of it. Thus it happened that tiny Joe, who was not a bit attractive, and Bennie and Johnnie, who were disagreeable babies if such a thing may be, and Sam and Katie whose fathers and mothers were drunkards, as well as a dozen other little waifs, were given away long before Marian learned to talk: Marian, the beautiful baby, was somehow always kept behind Mrs. Moore's

skirts. As the child grew older, she was still kept in the background. The plainest dresses ever sent in to Little Pilgrims, were given to Marian. Her hair was kept short and when special visitors were expected, she was taken to the playground by an older girl. All this time a happier baby never lived than Marian. No one in the Home knew how tenderly Mrs. Moore loved her. No one knew of the caresses lavished upon her when the infant Pilgrims were busy with their blocks or asleep in their cribs.

At last the superintendent questioned Mrs. Moore. He said it seemed strange that no one wished to adopt so lovely a child. Mrs. Moore explained. She told the superintendent she hoped Marian would be claimed by folks of her own, but if not—Mrs. Moore hesitated at that and the superintendent understood.

"We won't give her away," he promised, "until we find the right kind of a mother for her. That child shall have a good home."

Too soon to please Mrs. Moore, Marian out-

grew her crib and went to sleep in the dormitory. The child was pleased with the change, especially as Mrs. Moore tucked her in bed and kissed her every night just as she had done in the nursery. Marian was glad to be no longer a baby. The dormitory with its rows and rows of little white beds, delighted the child, and to be allowed to sit up hours after the babies were asleep was pure joy.

The dining-room was another pleasure. To sit down to dinner with two hundred little girls and boys and to be given one of the two hundred bright bibs, filled her heart with pride. The bibs certainly were an attraction. Marian was glad hers was pink. She buttoned it to her chair after dinner just as she saw the others do.

One thing troubled Marian. She wished Mrs. Moore to sit at the table beside her and drink milk from a big, white mug. "Do childrens always have dinner all alone?" she asked.

Instead of answering the child, Mrs. Moore told her to run away and play. Then she

looked out of the window for a long, long time. Perhaps she had done wrong after all in keeping the baby so long in a "Home with a capital H."

CHAPTER II

MARIAN'S FIRST DAY IN SCHOOL

THERE was no kindergarten in the Home for Little Pilgrims when Marian was a baby. The child was scarcely five when she marched into the schoolroom to join the changing ranks of little folks who were such a puzzle to their teacher. Every day one or more new faces appeared in that schoolroom and every day familiar faces were gone. For that reason alone it was a hard school to manage.

The teacher, who had been many years in the Home, smiled as she found a seat for Marian in the front row. Marian at least might be depended upon to come regularly to school: then, too, she would learn easily and be a credit to her instructor. Plain dresses and short hair might do their worst, the face of the child attracted attention. The teacher smiled again as Marian sat in the front seat before her, with hands folded, waiting to see what might happen next.

Roll call interested the child. She wondered why the little girls and boys said "Present" when the teacher read their names from a big book. Once in a while when a name was called, nobody answered. Finally the teacher, smiling once more, said, "Marian Lee." The little girl sat perfectly still with lips tightly closed.

"You must say 'present' when your name is called," suggested the teacher.

No response.

"Say present," the teacher repeated.

"But I don't like this kind of play," Marian protested, and then wondered why all the children laughed and the teacher looked annoyed.

"But you must say present," the young lady insisted and Marian obeyed, though she thought it a silly game.

The things that happened in the schoolroom that morning were many and queer. A little boy had to stand on the floor in front of the teacher's desk because he threw a paper wad. Then when the teacher wasn't looking he aimed another at Marian and hit

her on the nose and when Marian laughed aloud, the teacher, who didn't know what happened, shook her head and looked cross. It distressed Marian so to have the teacher look cross that she felt miserable and wondered what folks went to school for anyway. A few moments later, she knew. The primer class was called and Marian, being told to do so, followed a dozen Little Pilgrims to the recitation seat where she was told that children go to school to learn their letters. Marian knew her letters, having learned them from the blocks in the nursery.

"You must learn to read," advised the teacher, and Marian stared helplessly about the schoolroom. She felt sure it wouldn't be a bit of fun to learn to read. Nor was it, if her first lesson was a sample.

It wasn't long before Marian was tired of sitting still. She wasn't used to it. At last she remembered that in her pocket was a china doll, an inch high. On her desk was the new primer. The cover was pasteboard and of course one could chew pasteboard. The china doll needed a crib and as there seemed

nothing to make a crib of but the cover of her primer, Marian chewed a corner of it, flattened it out and fitted the doll in. It pleased her, and she showed it to the little girl in the next seat. Soon the teacher noticed that Marian was turning around and showing her primer to all the children near, and the children were smiling.

"Marian, bring your book to me," said the teacher. Then there was trouble. Little Pilgrims had to be taught not to chew their books. The teacher gave Marian what one of the older girls called a "Lecture," and Marian cried.

"I didn't have anything to do," she sobbed.

"Nothing to do?" exclaimed the teacher, "why, little girl, you should study your lesson as you see the other children doing. That is why you are in school—to study."

Marian went to her seat, but how to study she didn't know. She watched the other children bending over their books, making noises with their lips, so she bent over her primer and made so much noise the teacher told her she must keep still.

"Why, Marian," said the young lady, "what makes you so naughty? I thought you were a good little girl!"

Poor Marian didn't know what to think. Tears, however, cleared her views. She decided that as going to school was a thing that must be endured because Mrs. Moore would be displeased otherwise, it would do no good to make a fuss. She would draw pictures on her slate or play with the stones in her pocket—anything to pass the time. There was a great deal in knowing what one could or could not do safely, and Marian learned that lesson faster than she learned to read. When she was dismissed that afternoon, the little girl flew to the nursery to tell Mrs. Moore about her first school day. Soon after when Marian ran laughing into the hall on her way to the playground, she met Janey Clark who sat behind her in school.

"Is Mrs. Moore your ma?" asked Janey.

"What's a ma?" inquired Marian, seizing Janey's two hands.

"A ma," was the reply, "why a ma is a mother. Is Mrs. Moore your mother?"

"Maybe," agreed Marian. "Oh, no, she isn't either. I know all about mothers, we sing about 'em, of course. I guess I never had one."

"My mother just died," declared Janey, tossing her head in an important way that aroused Marian's envy.

"Well, mine died too!" responded Marian.

"Did you have a funeral?" persisted Janey.

"Did you?" Marian cautiously inquired.

"Well I should say yes," was the reply.

"Then I did too," observed Marian.

"Well," remarked Janey, "that's nothing to brag of; I don't suppose there's anybody in this Home that got here unless all their folks died dead. We are here because we don't belong anywhere else, and we are going to be given away to folks that'll take us, pretty soon."

That was too much for Marian. "Why, Janey Clark, what a talk!" she exclaimed, then turning, she ran back to the nursery.

"Nanna, Nanna!" she cried, "where's my mother?"

Mrs. Moore almost dropped a fretful baby at the question.

"Did I ever have a mother?" continued the child, whose dark blue eyes looked black she was so much in earnest. "I thought mothers were just only in singing, but Janey Clark had a mother and she died, and if Janey Clark had a mother, I guess I had one too that died."

The fretful baby was given to an assistant and Mrs. Moore took Marian in her lap. "What else did Janey tell you?" she asked.

"Well, Janey said that all of us childrens are going to be gived away to folks. Mrs. Moore, did all the childrens that live here have mothers that died?"

"Not all of them, Marian, some of the mothers are living and the children will go back to them: but your mother, little girl, will never come back for you. God took her away when He sent you to us. We keep little children here in our home until we find new fathers and mothers for them. Sometimes lovely mothers come here for little girls

like you. How is it, Marian, do you want a mother?"

The child nodded her head and looked so pleased Mrs. Moore was disappointed. It would be hard enough to part with the child anyway, but to think she wished to go was surprising.

Two soft arms stole around Mrs. Moore's neck. "I'm going to have you for my mother," Marian explained, "and I'm going to live here always. I don't want to be gived away."

CHAPTER III

SHE GOES TO CHURCH

JANEY CLARK was taken ill one day and was carried to the hospital. When she returned months afterward, she had something to tell Marian.

"You want to get yourself adopted," was her advice. "I'm going to, first chance I get. When I was too well to stay in the hospital and not enough well to come home, a pretty lady came and said would I like to go to her house and stay until I was all better."

"Did she 'dopt you?" questioned Marian.

"No, of course not, or I could have stayed at her house and she would be my mother. She didn't want to keep me but only to borrow me so the children she is aunt to would know about Little Pilgrims and how lucky it is not to be one their own selves. And at her house," continued Janey, "if you liked something they had for dinner pretty well,

you could have a second helping, if you would say please. You better believe I said it when there was ice cream. And the children she was aunt to took turns dividing chocolate candy with me, and the only trouble was they gave me too much and made me sick most all the time. What do you think! One day a girl said she wished I was a little cripple like a boy that was there once, because she liked to be kind to little cripples and wash their faces. Wasn't she just lovely? Oh, Marian, I want to be adopted and have a mother like that lady and a room all my own and everything."

"But I would rather live with Mrs. Moore," objected Marian. "I've picked her out for my mother."

"All right for you, stay here if you want to," agreed Janey, "but I'm not, you just wait and see."

Janey Clark was adopted soon after and when Marian was invited to visit her, she changed her mind about living forever in the Home for Little Pilgrims. Mrs. Moore promised to choose a mother for her from the

many visitors to the Home, yet she and Marian proved hard to suit.

"I want a mother just like my Nanna," said Marian to the superintendent, who agreed to do all he could to find one. In spite of his help Marian seemed likely to stay in the Home, not because no one wanted her but because the child objected to the mothers who offered themselves. All these months the little girl was so happy and contented the superintendent said she was like a sunbeam among the Little Pilgrims and if the school-teacher had some ideas that he and Mrs. Moore didn't share, she smiled and said nothing.

In time, Marian talked of the mother she wished to have as she did of heaven—of something beautiful but too indefinite and far away to be more than a dream. One never-to-be-forgotten morning, the dream took shape. A woman visited the Home, leading a little girl by the hand. A woman so lovely the face of the dullest Little Pilgrim lighted as she passed. It was not so much the bright gold of her hair, nor the blue eyes that at-

tracted the children, but the way she smiled and the way she spoke won them all.

She was the mother for whom Marian had waited. It didn't occur to the child that the woman might not want her.

It was noon before the strangers were through visiting the chapel, the schoolroom, the nursery and the dormitories. Like a shadow Marian had followed them over the building, fearing to lose sight of her chosen mother. On reaching the dining-room the woman and child, with the superintendent, stood outside the door where they watched the Little Pilgrims march in to dinner. Noticing Marian, the superintendent asked her why she didn't go to the table, and Marian tried to tell him but couldn't speak a word. The man was about to send her in the dining-room when he caught the appealing look on the child's face. At that moment the stranger turned. Marian seized her dress and the woman, glancing down, saw the dear little one and stooping, kissed her.

The superintendent smiled but Marian began to cry as the woman tried ever so gently

to release her dress from the small, clinging fingers.

"We must go now," the stranger said, "so good-bye, dear child."

"I'm going with you," announced Marian. "I want you for my mother."

"But, don't you see, I have a little girl? What could I do with two?" remonstrated the woman. "There, there," she continued, as Marian began to sob piteously, "run in to dinner and some day I will come to see you again. Perhaps they may let you visit my little girl and me before long. Would you like that?"

"No, no," wailed Marian, "I want you for my mother."

"Come, Marian, sweetheart, let's go find Mrs. Moore," suggested the superintendent, taking her by force from the visitor, whose eyes filled with tears at the sight of little outstretched arms. For years afterwards there were times when that woman seemed to feel the clinging fingers of the Little Pilgrim who chose her for her mother. She might have taken her home. The next time she

called to inquire for the child, Marian was gone.

An unexpected thing happened as Marian was borne away to the nursery. The stranger's little girl cried and would not be comforted because she couldn't stay and have dinner with the Little Pilgrims. She was still grieving over her first sorrow after Mrs. Moore had succeeded in winning back the smiles to the face of her precious Marian.

"Well, I know one sure thing," declared the Little Pilgrim as she raised her head from Mrs. Moore's shoulder and brushed away the tears. "I know that same mother will come and get me some time and take me home and then you will come and live with me—and won't it be lovely! Let's have some dinner, I'm hungry!"

Mrs. Moore smiled and sighed at the same time, but she ordered a luncheon for two served in the nursery and Marian's troubles vanished: also the luncheon.

The next time the superintendent saw the child, she was sitting on the nursery floor singing to the babies. He was surprised and

pleased when he heard the sweet, clear voice and straightway sought Mrs. Moore.

"Let me take her Sunday," he suggested. "I didn't know our Marian was a singer."

"Are you going into the country?" asked the nurse.

"No, Mrs. Moore, not this time. We expect to have services in one of the largest churches right here in the city. We have made special arrangements and I shall take twenty-five of the best singers in the Home with me. Marian will have plenty of company."

"She is young," objected Mrs. Moore.

The superintendent laughed. "Petey Ross," said he, "was two years old when he made his first public appearance on the platform; Marian is nearly six."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Moore, "that is true and I remember that Petey Ross was adopted and in less than a week after that first appearance. Marian," she continued, "come here, darling. Do you want to go to a big church with the children next Sunday and sing one of the songs you and I sing to the babies?"

"Yes, Nanna, what for?"

"Because the superintendent wishes you to. Every Sunday he takes some of our little boys and girls away to sing in the different churches, where he tells the people all about the Home for Little Pilgrims."

"Oh, yes, now I know," declared Marian. "Janey Clark used to go and sing. She said that was the way to get yourself adopted. I'd like to go if I don't have to get adopted and if Nanna may go too."

"All right, Marian, I will go," assented Mrs. Moore, "and nobody shall adopt you unless you wish it. Now run back to the babies. Little Ned and Jakey are quarreling over the elephant. Hurry, Marian, or its ears will be gone."

"She'll demand a salary in another year," remarked the superintendent, watching the little girl's successful management of the babies.

"I shouldn't know how to get along without her," said Mrs. Moore, "and yet it isn't right to let her grow up here."

Sunday morning it would have been hard

to find a happier child than Marian anywhere in the big city. She had never been in a church before and quickly forgot her pretty white dress and curls in the wonder of it all. She sat on the platform, a radiant little Pilgrim among the twenty-five waifs. Soon the church was filled. After the opening exercises the service was turned over to the superintendent of the Home for Little Pilgrims. He made a few remarks, and then asked Marian to sing. Pleased by the friendly faces in the pews and encouraged by Mrs. Moore's presence, Marian sang timidly at first, then joyously as to the babies in the nursery.

"'I am Jesus' little lamb
Happy all the day I am,
Jesus loves me this I know
For I'm His lamb.'"

As she went on with the song, the little girl was surprised to see many of the audience in tears. Even Mrs. Moore was wiping her eyes, although she smiled bravely and Marian knew she was not displeased. What could be the matter with the folks that bright Sunday morn-

ing? Janey Clark said everybody always cried at funerals. Perhaps it was a funeral. At the close of her song Marian sat down, much puzzled. After Johnnie Otis recited the poem he always recited on Visitors' Day at school, "The Orphan's Prayer," all the Little Pilgrims, Marian included, were asked to sing their chapel song. What was there sad about that, Marian wondered. She always sang it over and over to the babies to make them stop crying.

"It is all for the best, oh, my Father,
All for the best, all for the best."

When the Little Pilgrims were seated, the superintendent made a speech to which Marian listened. For the first time in her life she knew the meaning of the Home for Little Pilgrims. She understood at last all that Janey Clark had tried to tell her. No wonder the people cried. Marian stared at the superintendent, longing and dreading to hear more. Story after story he told of wrecked homes and scattered families; of little children, homeless and friendless left to their fate upon the street.

"Whatever may be the causes which bring these waifs to our doors, remember," said he, "the children themselves are not to blame. It is through no fault of theirs their young lives have been saddened and trouble has come upon them while your little ones are loved and cared for in comfortable homes."

The superintendent grew eloquent as he went on. How could it be, Marian wondered, that she had never known before what a sad, sad place was the Little Pilgrims' Home? Where did her mother die and where was her father? Perhaps he was in the dreadful prison mentioned by the superintendent. It was such a pitiful thing to be a Little Pilgrim. Marian wondered how she had ever lived so long. Oh, if she could change places with one of the fortunate little ones in the pews. The superintendent was right. Every little girl needed a father and mother of her own. She wanted the lovely mother who had passed her by. What was the superintendent saying? something about her? The next thing Marian knew the man had taken her in his arms and placed her upon the little table

beside him. She thought he said "'For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven,'"—she wasn't sure.

In the quiet moment that followed, Marian looked all over the church for the mother of her dreams. Maybe she was there and perhaps she would take her home. If she could only see that one face for a moment.

"I am going to ask our little girl for another song," the superintendent said, telling Marian what to sing. The child hesitated, then looked appealing towards Mrs. Moore. She had forgotten her during the speech—dear, kind Mrs. Moore.

"Don't be frightened," whispered the superintendent, whereupon to the surprise of every one in the church, Marian put her head upon his shoulder and sobbed aloud, "I don't want to be a Little Pilgrim any more! Oh, I don't want to be a Little Pilgrim any more!"

Another second and Mrs. Moore's arms were around the child and the superintendent was alone on the platform with the twenty-five.

"He told me to take you for a walk in the park," whispered Mrs. Moore, "so don't cry,

Marian, and we will leave the church quickly as we can. We will talk about the Little Pilgrims out in the sunshine where the birds are singing and we can see the blue sky."

Mrs. Moore would have been tempted to have stayed in the church had she known the superintendent's reason for wishing her to take the child away; nor would the good man have done as he did, could he have guessed the immediate consequences. When Marian was gone, the superintendent told her story effectively. She might have had her choice of many homes within a week had it not been for the appearance of Aunt Amelia.

CHAPTER IV

AUNT AMELIA

THERE was no question about it. Aunt Amelia had a perfect right to claim the child. The superintendent was sorry to admit it, but what could he do? Mrs. Moore was heart-broken, but she was powerless. The proofs were positive. Aunt Amelia's husband and Marian Lee's father were half-brothers and here was Aunt Amelia insisting upon her right to do her duty by the child.

Marian never heard of Aunt Amelia until it was all over and the superintendent sent for her. She came dancing into the office, her face aglow until she saw Aunt Amelia. Then the sunshine faded from her eyes and she shrank past the stranger, scarcely breathing until the superintendent's arms were about her. From that safe shelter she surveyed Aunt Amelia.

There was nothing in the woman's appearance to inspire confidence in a little child.

She was tall, thin, bloodless. One felt conscious of the bones in her very forehead. She wore her scant, black hair in wiry crimps parted in the middle. Her eyes were the color of stone, while her lips formed a thin, pale lone line closing over projecting front teeth. There was a brittle look about her ears and nose as though a blow might shatter them. Angles completed the picture.

"You say you have a child of your own, Mrs. St. Claire?" The superintendent asked the question doubtfully. It seemed probable that his ears had deceived him.

"I have," was the reply.

"Then Marian will be sure of a playmate." The man seemed talking to himself.

"If she behaves herself—perhaps," was the response.

"What do you mean?" demanded the superintendent.

"I think I expressed myself clearly," said Mrs. St. Claire. "If Marian behaves and is worthy of my little daughter's companionship, we may allow them to play together occasionally."

"Does she want to 'dopt me?" whispered Marian; "tell her no, quick—I got to go back to the nursery. Put me down."

"I am your Aunt Amelia," announced the woman, "and I have come to take you to Michigan to live with your Uncle George and me."

"Where did I get any Uncle George?" asked Marian, turning to the superintendent.

"It isn't necessary to give a mere child too much information," put in Mrs. St. Claire; "it is enough for her to know that she has relatives who are willing to take her and do their duty by her."

Regardless of this the man answered one of the questions he saw in Marian's solemn blue eyes.

"Your uncle and aunt," he explained, "are visiting in the city; they were in church last Sunday when you sang. When relatives come for Little Pilgrims, Marian, we have to let them go."

"You will not send me away with—her!" exclaimed the child, terror and entreaty expressed in the uplifted face.

"Dear child, we must."

"But I won't go, I won't go," cried Marian, clinging to the superintendent for protection. "Oh, you won't send me away, Mrs. Moore won't let them take me—I won't go! Please let me stay until the pretty mother comes again and I will ask her to take me and I know she will. Oh, if you love me, don't send me away with her!"

"It is just as I told my husband Sunday morning," remarked Mrs. St. Claire as the superintendent tried to soothe Marian's violent grief. "I said the child was subject to tantrums. It is sad to see such traits cropping out in one so young. Lack of training may have much to do with it. Other influences ——"

"Pardon me, madam," interrupted the superintendent, "you forget that this little one has been with us since she was six months old. Mrs. Moore has been a mother to her in every sense of the word. It is only natural that she dreads going among strangers. She is a good little girl and we all love her. Hush, sweetheart," he whispered to the sob-

bing, trembling child, "perhaps your aunt may decide to leave you with us."

"I—I—I won't—won't go," protested Marian, "I—I won't go, I won't go!"

"Are you willing, madam, to give this child to us?" continued the superintendent; "perhaps you may wish to relinquish your claim, under the circumstances."

"I never shrink from my duty," declared the woman, rising as she spoke, grim determination in every line of her purple gown; "my husband feels it a disgrace to find his brother's child in an orphan asylum. She cannot be left in a charitable institution while we have a crust to bestow upon her. She will take nothing from this place except the articles which belonged to her mother. I will call for the child at eight this evening. Good-morning, sir."

"I—I won't go—I—won't go! You—you needn't come for me!" Marian had the last word that time.

The babies were left to the care of assistant nurses that afternoon. Mrs. Moore held Marian and rocked her as on that night so

long before when she became a little Pilgrim. For some time neither of them spoke and tears fell like rain above the brown head nestled in Mrs. Moore's arms. Marian was the first to break the silence. "I—I won't go, I won't go," she repeated between choking sobs, "I—I won't go, I won't go, she'll find out she won't get me!"

Mrs. Moore tried to think of something to say. Just then a merry voice was heard singing in the hall outside,

> "It is all for the best, oh, my Father,
> All for the best, all for the best."

"Will they let me come to see you every day?" asked Marian when the singer was beyond hearing. "Will they?" she repeated as Mrs. Moore made no answer. "Where is Michigan, anyway? What street car goes out there?"

It was some time before Mrs. Moore could speak. Her strongest impulse was to hide the precious baby. What would become of her darling among unloving strangers? Who

would teach her right from wrong? Suddenly Mrs. Moore realized that in days to come there might be time enough for tears. There were yet a few hours left her with the little girl which she must improve.

Gently and tenderly she told Marian the truth. Michigan was far, far away. She must go alone, to live among strangers—yet not alone, for there was One in heaven who would be with her and who would watch over her and love her always, as He had in the Home. Poor Marian heard the voice but the words meant nothing to her until long afterwards. Mrs. Moore herself could never recall just what she said that sad day. She knew she tried to tell Marian to be brave, to be good; to tell the truth and do right: but more than once she broke down and wept with her darling.

When Mrs. St. Claire called at eight, she was greeted by a quiet, submissive child who said she was ready to go. More than that, the little thing tried to smile as she promised to be a good girl. Perhaps the smile wouldn't have been so easily discouraged if Mrs. St.

Claire had kissed the swollen, tear-stained face, or had said one comforting word.

The time of parting came. When it was over, Mrs. Moore lifted the sobbing child into the carriage. Then she knew that in spite of the stars the night was dark.

CHAPTER V

MARIAN'S NEW HOME

The second day of the journey to the new home, Marian laughed aloud. She had slept well the night before and had taken a lively interest in everything she saw from the time she was awakened by the first glimpse of daylight through the sleeper windows. Not that she was happy, far from it, but it was something that she wasn't utterly miserable.

Uncle George was pleasanter than his wife, and although he said little from behind his newspaper, that little was encouraging: his tones were kind.

Ella St. Claire, the cousin, three years younger than Marian, was inclined to be friendly. Left to themselves the children might have had a delightful time, but Mrs. St. Claire had no intention of leaving the two to themselves; it was not part of her plan. Marian made several attempts to get acquainted

and Ella kept edging away from her mother, until in the middle of the forenoon, Mrs. St. Claire remarked that if she wished to have any peace she must separate the children. Accordingly she took Ella by the hand and went several seats back, leaving Marian alone. As she left, Ella begged for a cooky.

"I'm hungry, too," added Marian.

Mrs. St. Claire gave Ella the cooky and passed a bit of dry bread to Marian.

"If you please," suggested Marian, "I like cookies, too."

"You will take what I give you or go without," said Mrs. St. Claire; "you can't be starving after the breakfast you ate in Buffalo."

Marian, sorry she had spoken, dropped from sight in the high-backed seat. There was a lump in her throat and so deep a longing for the Home she had left it was hard to keep the tears back. Just then an old man began snoring so loud the passengers smiled and Marian laughed in spite of herself. Having laughed once she grew more cheerful. There were green fields and bits of woodland to be seen from the car windows, cows, sheep, bright

flowers growing along the track, country roads and little children playing in their yards, sitting on fences and waving their hands to the passing train. Wonderful sights for a child straight from the Little Pilgrims' Home in a big city.

Uncle George, growing tired of his paper, crossed the aisle and sat down beside his niece. Marian looked up with a happy smile. "I wish the cars would stop where the flowers grow," she said, "I'd like to pick some."

"The cars will stop where the flowers grow," answered the man. "When we get home you will live among the flowers; Marian, will you like that?"

"Oh, goody!" the child exclaimed. "Oh, I am so glad! May I pick some flowers?"

"Indeed you may, and we'll go to the woods where the wild flowers are. Were you ever in the woods?"

Marian shook her head. "I've been in the Public Gardens and on the Common, though, and I know all about woods."

"Who told you about the woods?"

"Nanna—Mrs. Moore."

"Was she your nurse?"

"Yes, Uncle George, she was my everybody. I love her more than anybody else in the world. She is the prettiest, nicest one in the Home."

"See here, little girl," interrupted the man, "will you promise me something?"

"Why, yes, what is it?"

"I want you to do me this one favor. Don't tell any one you were ever in an orphan's home."

The child was silent. "What will I talk about?" she finally asked.

Uncle George laughed. "Take my advice and don't say much about anything," was his suggestion. "You'll find it the easiest way to get along. But whatever you talk about, don't mention that Home."

Later, Aunt Amelia added a word on the same subject, but in a manner so harsh Marian became convinced that to have lived in an orphan asylum was a disgrace equal perhaps to a prison record. She determined never to mention the Home for Little Pilgrims. Janey Clark must have known what she was talking

about and even Mrs. Moore, when questioned, had admitted that if she had a little girl it would make her feel sad to know she lived in a Home. Before the journey was ended Marian was thankful that relatives had claimed her. Perhaps if she tried hard, she might be able to win Aunt Amelia's love. She would be a good little girl and do her best.

One thing Marian learned before she had lived ten days with Aunt Amelia. The part of the house where she was welcome was the outside. Fortunately it was summer and the new home was in a country town where streets were wide and the yards were large. Back of Aunt Amelia's garden was an orchard, and there or in the locust grove near by, Marian passed untroubled hours. The front lawn, bordered with shrubs and flower beds, was pleasing enough, but it wasn't the place for Marian who was not allowed to pick a blossom, although the pansies begged for more chance to bloom. She could look at the pansies though, and feel of the roses if Aunt Amelia was out of sight. How Marian loved the roses—especially the velvety pink ones.

She told them how much she loved them, and if the roses made no response to the endearing terms lavished upon them, at least they never turned away, nor said unkind, hard things to make her cry and long for Mrs. Moore.

When Marian had been with the St. Claires a week, Aunt Amelia told her she could never hope to hear from Mrs. Moore, partly because Mrs. Moore didn't know where she lived, and also because Mrs. Moore would gladly forget such a bad tempered, ungrateful little girl.

The pink roses under the blue sky were a comfort then. So were the birds. Day after day Marian gave them messages to carry to Mrs. Moore. She talked to them in the orchard and in the locust grove, and many a wild bird listened, with its head on one side, to the loving words of the little girl and then flew straight away over the tree-tops and the house-tops, away and away out of sight. Several weeks passed before Marian knew that she might pick dandelions and clover blossoms, Bouncing Bet and all the roadside blooms, to her heart's content. That was joy!

Under a wide-spreading apple-tree, Marian

made a collection of treasures she found in the yard. Curious stones were chief among them. Bits of moss, pretty twigs, bright leaves, broken china, colored glass—there was no end to the resources of that yard. One morning she found a fragile cup of blue. It looked like a tiny bit of painted egg shell, but how could an egg be so small, and who could have painted it? She carried the wonder to Uncle George who told her it was part of a robin's egg.

"Who ate it?" asked Marian, whereupon Uncle George explained to her what the merest babies knew in the world outside the city. More than that, he went to the orchard, found a robin's nest on the low branch of an apple-tree, and lifted her on his shoulder so that she might see it. There were four blue eggs in the nest. Marian wanted to break them to see the baby birds inside, but Uncle George cautioned her to wait and let the mother bird take care of her own round cradle.

In the meantime Madam Robin scolded Uncle George and Marian until they left the

tree to watch her from a distance. That robin's nest filled Marian's every thought for days and days. When the baby birds were hatched she was so anxious to see them oftener than Uncle George had time to lift her on his shoulder, she learned to climb the tree. After that Marian was oftener in the apple-trees than under them. Had there been no rainy days and had the summer lasted all the year, Marian would have been a fortunate child. Aunt Amelia called her a tomboy and said no one would ever catch Ella St. Claire climbing trees and running like a wild child across the yard and through the locust grove.

The two children admired each other. Had it been possible they would have played together all the time. Marian, who became a sun-browned romp, thought there never was such a dainty creature as her delicate, white-skinned cousin Ella, whose long black curls were never tumbled by the wind or play : and Ella never missed a chance to talk with her laughing, joyous cousin, who could always think of something new.

Aunt Amelia said that Ella wasn't the same

child when she was left with Marian for half an hour, and she could not allow the children to play together for her little daughter's sake. It was her duty as a mother to guard that little daughter from harmful influences.

This was the talk to which Marian listened day after day. It grieved her to the quick. Again and again, especially on rainy days, she promised Aunt Amelia that she would be good, and each time Aunt Amelia sent her to her room to think over the bad things she had done and what an ungrateful child she was. Although Marian became convinced that she was a bad child, she couldn't sit down and think of her sins long at a time, and her penitent spells usually ended in a concert. Uncle George took her to one early in the summer, and ever after, playing concert was one of Marian's favorite games. She had committed "Bingen on the Rhine" to memory from hearing it often read in school at the Home, and on rainy days when sent to her room, she chanted it, wailed it and recited it until poor Ella was unhappy and discontented because she could have no part in the fun.

Ella had a toy piano kept as an ornament. Marian's piano was a chair, her stool was a box and her sheet music, an almanac: but in her soul was joy.

"What can you do with such a child?" demanded Aunt Amelia.

"Let her alone," counseled Uncle George.

CHAPTER VI

THAT YELLOW CUCUMBER

One summer day the St. Claires were the guests of a farmer who lived a few miles from town. Ella stayed in the house with her mother and the farmer's wife, but Marian saw the farm ; the cows and the sheep and the fields of grain. She asked more questions that day than the hired man ever answered at one time in his life before, and when night came he and Marian were tired.

"She knows as much about farming as I do," the man said with a laugh as he put the sleepy child on the back seat of the carriage when the family were ready to go home.

"I've had a lovely time, Mr. Hired Man," Marian roused herself to remark, "and to-morrow I'm going to play farm."

"Good haying weather," the man suggested with a smile ; "better get your barns up quick's you can."

"I'm going to," was the response; "it's a lovely game."

Whatever Marian saw or heard that pleased her fancy, she played. Stories that were read to the little Ella were enacted again and again in Marian's room if the day was rainy, out in the orchard or the locust grove if the day was fair. Farming promised to be the most interesting game of all.

Early the next morning Marian visited what she called the yarrow jungle ever since Uncle George read jungle stories to Ella. More than one queer looking creature tried to keep out of sight when her footsteps were heard. The old black beetle scampered away as fast as his six legs would carry him, though it can't be possible he remembered the time when Marian captured him for her museum. Crickets gathered up their fiddles, seeking safety beyond the fence. Perhaps they thought Marian wanted them to play in the orchestra at another snail wedding. Even the ants hastened to the hills beyond the jungle, leaving only the old toad to wink and blink at the happy one of whom he had no fear.

"Well, Mr. Toad," said she, "why don't you hop along? I've come to make my farm out here where the yarrow grows. Why don't you live in the garden land? I would if I were you. Don't you know about the cool tomato groves and the cabbage tents? I've got to clear away this jungle so the sun may shine upon my farm the way the country man said. You really must go, so hop along and stop winking and blinking at me." The old toad wouldn't stir, so for his sake Marian spared the yarrow jungle.

"After all, I'll make my farm here on the border-land," said she, while the daisies nodded and the buttercups shone brighter than before. "Only, I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Toad, that maybe you won't like. If you will stay there, you'll have to be an elephant in the jungle. There, now, I s'pose you are sorry. I say—be an elephant and now you are one." The toad didn't mind a bit. He was so used to being changed into all sorts of animals that he never seemed to notice whether he was an elephant or a kangaroo.

Day after day Marian worked upon her

farm, enclosing fields and meadows with high stone walls, clearing roads and planting trees. Whatever she touched became what she wished it to be. Pasteboard match-boxes became houses and barns. Sticks became men working upon the farm and spools were wagons bearing loads of hay from place to place. At a word from her, green apples, standing upon four twigs, were instantly changed, becoming pigs, cows, sheep and horses. Kernels of yellow corn were chickens. It was a wonderful farm and for many a sunny hour Marian was happy. Even the old toad, winking and blinking beneath the shadow of the yarrow jungle, must have known it.

At last there came a morning when the child went strolling through the garden. Suddenly, while singing her usual merry song, the joyous look faded from her face. She no longer saw the butterflies floating about nor cared that the bumble-bee wore his best velvet coat. There were tiny green cucumbers in that garden, just the right size for horses on the little girl's farm. There were a great many cucumbers, so many that Marian

felt sure no one would ever miss a few. She picked a handful and knew that she was stealing. The sun went under a cloud. A blue jay mocked at her and a wren scolded. Though far from happy, Marian hurried away to her farm. The old toad saw her sticking twigs in the cucumbers. Then she placed them in a row.

"Now be animals!" she commanded, but the spell was broken—she was no longer a farmer with magic power, but a pink-faced little girl who had done what she knew was wrong. And the cucumbers refused to be anything but cucumbers.

Again the little girl went to the garden, returning with one big yellow cucumber that had gone to seed. "Now I guess I'll have a cucumber animal," she said, in tones so cross the daisies seemed to tremble. "You bad old cucumber, you're no good anyway, nobody could eat you, nor make a pickle of you, so you may just turn yourself into a giant cow right off this minute! There you are, standing on four sticks. Now be a cow, I say."

The old cucumber wouldn't be a cow.

There it stood, big and yellow, spoiling the looks of the farm.

"What's the matter with you, old toad?" went on the little girl. "I tell you that's a cow, and if you don't believe it you can just get off my farm quick's you can hop. You're homely anyway, and you turned yourself back into a toad when I said be an elephant."

How surprised the toad was when the little girl took a stick and poked him along ahead of her. The poor old fellow had never been treated like that in his life. When he reached the garden he hid beneath the nearest cabbage plant. The little girl went on but came back in a short time with her apron full of cucumbers.

"I guess I'll sit down here and put the sticks in them," she said: but instead of touching the cucumbers the child sat on the ground beside the toad forever so long, looking cross, oh, so cross. The toad kept perfectly still and by and by he and the little girl heard a man whistling. In a few minutes there was a long whistle and then no sound in the jungle save the buzzing of flies and the

chirping of birds. The little girl was afraid of her uncle who had been her one friend in that land of strangers. Soon she heard them calling and with her apron full of cucumbers, Marian rose to meet him.

It may be that the old toad, as he hopped back to the yarrow jungle, thought that he should never again see the little girl: but the next morning in the midst of brightest sunshine, Marian returned, her head drooping. With her little feet she destroyed the farm and then, throwing herself face downward among the ruins, wept bitterly. When she raised her head the old toad was staring solemnly at her, causing fresh tears to overflow upon the round cheeks.

"Don't look at me, toad, nobody does," she wailed. "I'm dreadfully bad and it doesn't do a bit of good to be sorry. Nobody loves me and nobody ever will. Aunt Amelia says that Nanna wouldn't love me now. Uncle George doesn't love me, he says he's disappointed in me! Oh, dear, oh, dear! Nobody in this world loves me, toad, and oh, dear, I've got to eat all alone in the kitchen

for two weeks, and even the housemaid doesn't love me and can't talk to me! Oh, dear, what made me do it!"

What could an old toad do but hide in the yarrow jungle: yet when he turned away Marian felt utterly deserted. It was dreadful to be so bad that even a toad wouldn't look at her.

CHAPTER VII

AN UNDESERVING CHILD

Try as hard as she would, Marian could not fit into Aunt Amelia's home. Everywhere within its walls, she was Marian the unwanted. Saddest of all, the child annoyed Uncle George. Not at first, to be sure; he liked his little niece in the beginning, but when Aunt Amelia and the little Ella were rendered unhappy by her presence, that made a difference.

Early in the summer Uncle George insisted upon taking Marian wherever Ella and her mother went, to picnics, to the circus and other places of amusement, but as something disagreeable was sure to happen and trouble seemed to follow little Marian, she was finally left at home where her gay talk and merriment could not reach the ears of Aunt Amelia, who called her talk "clatter" and her laughter "cackle."

"It's cucumbers," sobbed Marian, the first time she was left with the sympathetic housemaid.

"What do you mean, you poor little thing?" asked the girl.

The child looked up in astonishment. "Don't you remember about the cucumbers?" she asked reproachfully.

"Cucumbers," sniffed the girl. "Never mind, you poor, sweet darling, we'll have a tea-party this afternoon, you and I,—that old pelican!"

Marian knew no better than to tell about the tea-party, what a jolly time she had and how happy she was, closing her story by asking Uncle George if a pelican was a chicken.

"Because," she added, "we had a little dish of cream chicken and I didn't see any pelican, but Annie did say two or three times, 'that old pelican!'"

Aunt Amelia was prejudiced against pelicans and she objected to tea-parties, so Annie packed her trunk and left. Lala took her place. Lala was equally kind but far too wise. She befriended the little girl every way in

her power but cautioned her to keep her mouth shut. She went so far as to instruct the child in the art of lying and had there not been deep in Marian's nature a love of truth, Lala's influence might have been more effective. Marian turned from her without knowing why, nor would she accept any favors from the girl unless she believed Aunt Amelia approved.

Lala called Marian a "Little fool," Aunt Amelia called her an undeserving, ungrateful child who would steal if she were not watched, a saucy, bold "young one" who had disappointed her Uncle George, and Uncle George plainly didn't love her. What wonder that Marian had a small opinion of herself and dreaded the first Monday in September, the beginning of her school-days among strangers.

The schoolhouse was so far from where Aunt Amelia lived, Marian carried her luncheon in a tin pail. The child left home that Monday, a timid, shrinking little mortal, afraid to speak to any one. She returned, happy as a lark, swinging her dinner pail and singing a new song until

within sight of the St. Claire home. Then she walked more slowly and entered the gate like a weary pilgrim. She expected trouble, poor little Marian, but there happened to be callers, giving her a chance to escape unnoticed to the locust grove where she made a jumping rope of a wild grape vine and played until the shadows were long and the day was done.

That evening Uncle George questioned Marian about her teacher and how she liked school. "I hope," said he, when he had listened to the account so gladly given, "I hope you will be a credit to your uncle and that you will behave yourself and get to the head of your class and stay there. Don't give your Uncle George any cause to be ashamed of his niece. I want to be proud of you."

"Oh, do you!" exclaimed the child. "Oh, I'll try so hard to be good and learn my lessons best of anybody. Then will you love me?"

"Good children are always loved," put in Aunt Amelia. "Doesn't your Uncle George love Ella?"

"She's his little girl," ventured Marian, longing for a place beside Ella in her uncle's lap. He certainly did love Ella.

"Sit down, child," said Uncle George, "you're my brother's little girl, aren't you, and you are Ella's cousin, aren't you?"

"I am sure she ought to be grateful," interrupted Aunt Amelia, "with all she has done for her and such a home provided for her ——"

"Oh, I am, I am," protested Marian earnestly. "I'm so glad I've got a home I don't know what to do, and I'm gratefuller'n anything ——"

"Queer way of showing your gratitude," exclaimed Aunt Amelia; "a more undeserving child I never saw."

Uncle George bit his lip. "Now don't cry, Marian," he cautioned, as the child's eyes filled with tears. "I have a story to read you and Ella, so sit down and be quiet."

"Don't expect her to be quiet," Aunt Amelia persisted. "If she would listen to stories as Ella does, I wouldn't send her to bed. You know as well as I do that she in-

terrupts and asks questions and gets in a perfect fever of excitement. Ella behaves like a lady. You never catch her squirming and fidgeting about, acting like a perfect jumping-jack ——"

"No," remarked Uncle George, opening the book in his hand, "she goes to sleep. Don't you, pet?"

"Go to bed, Marian," Aunt Amelia commanded. "Not a word. I shall not allow you to add sauciness to disobedience. Go!"

Uncle George frowned, put away the book and reached for his newspaper: then, touched by the pathetic figure in the doorway he called the child back. "That's right," he said, "be a good girl and obey your aunt promptly. She has your interest at heart, child. Come, kiss Uncle George good-night."

Marian was surprised because her natural tendency to kiss every one in the family before going to bed had been severely checked and she had been obliged to whisper her good-nights to the cat. If she sometimes kissed its soft fur, what difference did it make, if the cat had no objection.

"Now kiss little cousin Ella," suggested Uncle George, but Ella covered her face, saying her mother had told her never to let Marian touch her.

Uncle George looked so angry Marian didn't know what was going to happen. He put little Ella in her mother's lap and then taking Marian in his arms, carried her to her room. After the child had said her prayers and was in bed, Uncle George sat beside her and talked a long, long while. He told her to try and be a good child and do her best in school.

Marian dreamed that night of Mrs. Moore and the little stranger's mother. When she awoke in the starlight she was not afraid as usual. She thought of Uncle George and how she would try to please him in school that he might be proud of her and love her as she loved him, and so fell peacefully asleep.

When the man was looking over his papers the next morning before breakfast he felt a touch upon his arm. He smiled when he saw Marian. "I want to tell you," she said, "I'm awful sorry about the cucumbers."

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE NAME OF SANTA CLAUS

In November Ella and her mother began making plans for Christmas. Aunt Amelia invited seven little girls to tea one night when Uncle George was away, and Marian ate in the kitchen with Lala. The seven were all older than Ella and one of them, little Ruth Higgins, knowing no better, asked for Marian. Lala overheard the answer and was indignant.

"You poor little lamb," she sputtered, upon returning to the kitchen, "I'd run away if I were you."

"Where would I run to?" questioned Marian.

"Anywhere'd be better than here," the girl replied, "and that woman calls herself a Christian!"

"She's a awful cross Christian," Marian admitted in a whisper, brushing away the tears

that came when she heard the peals of laughter from the dining-room.

"I wouldn't cry if I were you," advised the girl. "You'll only spoil your pretty eyes and it will do them good to see you cry, you poor baby. The idea of having a party and making you stay out here!"

"It's a Club," corrected Marian, "I've heard 'em talking about it. Dorothy Avery and Ruth Higgins belong. I've tried so hard to be good so I could be in it. They are going to sew presents for poor children and give them toys and everything they don't want their own selves, and then when Christmas day comes they're going to have a sleigh ride and take the things to the poor children. If I was good like Ella, I could be in it. I used to be good, Lala, truly, I did."

"There, there, don't cry," begged Lala. "Look a-here! did you ever see anybody dance the lame man's jig?"

Marian shook her head, whereupon Lala performed the act to the music of a mournful tune she hummed, while Marian laughed until the Club was forgotten. There was

plenty of fun in the kitchen after that. In the midst of the hilarity Ella appeared to tell Marian it was her bedtime.

"Are you ever afraid, Lala, when you wake up all alone in the night?" asked Marian as she started up the back stairs.

"I never wake up," said Lala. "Do you, Marian?"

"Yes, and I'm lonesome without all the little girls. Sometimes I'm so frightened I pretty nearly die when I'm all alone and it's dark."

"Little girls," echoed Lala, "what little girls? Where did you live before you came here?"

"When I was good I lived in a big city, Lala."

"Tell me about it," the girl insisted.

"If you'll promise you won't ever tell, I will," declared Marian. "I'll have to whisper it. I lived in a beautiful orphan's home, Lala."

"Oh!" exclaimed Lala. "Oh, you poor baby."

"Of course it's dreadful," Marian hastened

to say, "but I couldn't help it, Lala, truly I couldn't; they took me there when I was a baby and it was a lovely place, only, it was a Home."

"Do you know anything about your father and mother?"

"Oh, I guess they're dead—my mother is anyway, and I'm 'fraid about my father."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, Lala, Aunt Amelia always says, what can you expect when you think what my father was. I guess may be he was a stealer because Aunt Amelia won't stop talking about the cucumbers and what could you expect. Maybe he is in prison."

"No, your father is not in prison, Marion Lee!" Lala exclaimed. "Listen. It was your father I heard them talking about with some callers the other day. I'm sure of it now, because they said the man was a great deal younger than your uncle——"

"Oh, tell me, do tell me what you know about my father?" besought Marian, walking back into the kitchen on tiptoes.

"Oh, I don't know much," said the girl,

"but he isn't in prison, that's one sure thing. He went away to South America years ago to make his fortune, and they know that all the men who went with him were killed, and as your father never came back they know he must be dead."

"What was there bad about that?" questioned the small daughter.

"Nothing," was the reply, "only he and your Uncle George had a quarrel. Your uncle didn't want him to go because he said your father had plenty of money anyway, and it all came out as he said it would."

At that moment, Ella returned. Seeing Marian, she forgot that she was after a drink of water. "Oh, Marian Lee!" she exclaimed. "I'm going straight back and tell mamma you didn't go to bed when I told you to. You'll be sorry."

Marian, the guilty, flew up the back stairs, expecting swift punishment. She was sure she deserved it, and what would Uncle George say? It was so hard to be good. Retribution was left to Santa Claus. How could a disobedient, ungrateful child expect to be re-

membered by that friend of good children? How could Marian hope for a single gift? Aunt Amelia didn't know. Nevertheless the little girl pinned her faith to Santa Claus. He had never forgotten her nor the two hundred waifs at the Home. Teddy Daniels once made a face at the superintendent the very day before Christmas, yet Santa Claus gave him a drum.

Marian wasn't the least surprised Christmas morning when she found her stockings hanging by the sitting-room grate filled to the brim, exactly as Ella's were. She was delighted beyond expression.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she cried. "Both my stockings are full of things for me. Oh, see the packages! Oh, I am so happy! Just only look at the presents!" Uncle George left the room and Marian sat upon the rug to examine her treasures.

"Why don't you look in your stockings, Ella?" she suggested. "Let's undo our presents together."

"No, I'd rather wait and see what you'll say when you know what you've got!" Ella

replied. "Mamma and I know something."

"Hush!" cautioned Aunt Amelia. "Let's see what Santa Claus has brought Marian. She knows whether she's been a deserving, grateful child or not."

Why would Aunt Amelia remind one of disagreeable things on Christmas morning? Marian's chin quivered before she took a thing from her stocking, whereupon Aunt Amelia smiled. In the meantime, Ella, becoming impatient, emptied one of her stockings in her mother's lap and began a series of squeals as toys, games and dolls tumbled out.

"Oh, what fun!" cried Marian, laughing and clapping her hands as she witnessed Ella's delight. A pitiful expression stole over her face as she turned to her own stockings. How she longed for a mother to share her joy. How she wished Aunt Amelia would smile kindly and be pleased with her gifts. The child quickly removed the paper from a round package.

"I've got a ball," she ventured. "I'll let you play with it, Ella."

"Got one of my own," said Ella, exhibiting a big rubber ball.

An exclamation of dismay burst from Marian's lips. "Why, why—it's a potato!" she cried.

"What did you expect?" inquired Aunt Amelia in chilling tones.

"I guess that was just for a joke." The little girl smiled cheerfully as she said it, at the same time untying a box wrapped in tissue paper. Potatoes again. Marian shut her lips tight together and tried another package. More potatoes. Still she kept the tears back and reached for a long bundle. Removing the paper she found switches. Aunt Amelia and Ella watched silently as Marian, her eyes blazing and her cheeks growing a deeper red every second, emptied the stocking in which there was nothing but potatoes. Then the child rose, straightened her small figure to its full height and made this statement:

"That wasn't never Santa Claus that did that!"

"Look in the other stocking," Ella advised, "there are real presents in that one. I guess

you will be a good girl now, won't you, Marian? Take the other stocking down, quick."

"No," declared Marian, "I don't want any more potatoes. Nobody loves me and I don't care if they don't." Then she broke down and cried so hard, Ella cried too.

"What's all the trouble?" asked Uncle George, entering the room at that moment.

"Marian is making a scene and distressing both Ella and me," explained Aunt Amelia. "She has been highly impertinent and ungrateful. Ella, you may have the other stocking yourself."

"But I don't want it," sobbed Ella. "I want Marian to have it."

"Then we'll take it to the poor children this afternoon," said her mother. "They'll be glad to get it. Marian, don't drop what's in your apron. Now go to your room and think over how you've spoiled the peace of a family on Christmas morning. I'll bring your breakfast to you myself."

"I don't want any breakfast," sobbed Marian, walking away with her apron full of potatoes.

"Come back," called Uncle George. "You tell your aunt you are sorry you were so naughty, and you may come to breakfast with us. It's Christmas morning, child, why can't you behave?"

"I wasn't naughty," sobbed Marian. "I ——"

"Not another word," put in Aunt Amelia. "Go to your room, stubborn, bad child. I can't have such an example continually before my little Ella. We'll have to put her in a reform school, George, if she doesn't improve."

This remark fell upon unheeding ears so far as Marian was concerned. The minute the door of her little room closed behind her she dropped the potatoes upon the floor and throwing herself beside them cried as if her heart would break.

"Oh, Nanna, Nanna, I want you," she sobbed. "Oh, where are you, oh, my Mrs. Moore?"

CHAPTER IX

AT THE RICH MAN'S TABLE

True to her word, Aunt Amelia carried Marian's breakfast to her room. But for the interference of Uncle George his little niece would have been given bread and water; it was all an impertinent child deserved. Uncle George, however, insisted that the One who was born on Christmas Day was a friend to sinners great and small. Out of respect to His memory, Marian should have her breakfast. Lala offered to take the tray up-stairs when it was ready, but Aunt Amelia said it was her duty to take it herself: so there was no one to speak a word of comfort to the little black sheep outside the fold.

It had been a dark, cloudy morning, but curiously enough, the moment the door closed behind Aunt Amelia, the sun came out bright and warm, and shone straight through Marian's window. The child raised her head, wiped

her eyes and finally sat up. She wouldn't eat any breakfast of course, how could she? No one loved her and what was the use of eating? The tray looked tempting though and the breakfast smelled good. The big orange seemed rolling toward her and Uncle George must have poured the cream on her oatmeal. No one else would have given her so much. The omelet was steaming, and even Lala never made finer looking rolls.

Marian moved a little nearer and a little nearer to the tray until the next thing she knew she was sitting in a chair, eating breakfast. Everything tasted good, and in a little while Marian felt better. Out of doors, the icy trees sparkled in the sunshine and all the world looked clean and new. Oh, how the little girl longed for a mother that Christmas morning. Some one who would love her and say "Dear little Marian," as Nanna once did.

Thinking of Mrs. Moore brought back to the child's memory that last day in the Home. Mrs. Moore had said, "Be brave, be good and never forget the Father in heaven." Marian had not been brave nor good; and she had for-

gotten the Father in heaven. Suddenly the child looked around the room, under the bed everywhere. She was certainly alone. It seemed strange to say one's prayers in the daytime, but Marian folded her hands and kneeling in the flood of sunshine beneath the window, confessed her sins. She felt like a new born soul after that. The despairing, rebellious little Marian was gone, and in her place was a child at peace with herself and the world. Without putting it in words, Marian forgave Aunt Amelia: more than that, she felt positively tender towards her. She would tell her she was sorry for her impertinence and promise to be a good child. It would be so easy to do right. She would set Ella a good example. Not for anything would Marian ever again do what was wrong. In time Uncle George and Aunt Amelia would love her dearly.

Marian smiled thoughtfully as she gazed down the straight and perfect path her little feet would travel from thenceforth forevermore. The child's meditations were interrupted by a remembrance of the potatoes. There they were, her Christmas presents, try-

ing to hide under the bed, under the chairs, beneath the bureau. She stared at them but a moment when a happy smile broke over her face.

Marian was a saint no longer; only a little girl about to play a new game.

"Why, it's a circus!" she exclaimed, and straightway seizing the potatoes and breaking the switches into little sticks, she transformed the unwelcome gift into a circus parade. The elephant came first. His trunk was a trifle too stiff as the switches were not limber. The camel came next and if his humps were not exactly in the right place, he was all the more of a curiosity. Then followed the giraffe with sloping back and no head worth mentioning because there was nothing to stick on the piece of switch that formed his long neck. Marian did wish she had a bit of gum to use for a head. The giraffe would look more finished. The lion and the tiger were perfect. Marian could almost hear them roar. Nobody could have found any fault with the kangaroo except that he would fall on his front feet. The hippopotamus was a sight worth going to

see. So was the rhinoceros. The zebras almost ran away, they were so natural.

Marian searched eagerly for more potatoes. A peck would have been none too many. "I'll have to play the rest of the animals are in cages," she said with a sigh. "Too bad I didn't get more potatoes. Wish I had the other stocking."

When Marian was tired of circus, she played concert. Bingen on the Rhine came in for its share of attention, but school songs were just as good and had ready-made tunes.

Lala in the kitchen, heard the operatic singing and laughed. Aunt Amelia caught a few strains, frowned and closed the hall doors. Uncle George smiled behind his newspaper: but Ella, tired of her toys, pouted and said she wished she could ever have any fun. Marian always had a good time. Mrs. St. Claire reminded her of the sleigh ride with the seven little girls in the afternoon and Ella managed to get through the morning somehow, even if it was dull and Christmas joy was nowhere in the house except in the little room off the back hall up-stairs.

At one o'clock Lala was sent to tell Marian she might come down to dinner if she would apologize to Aunt Amelia for her impertinence. Lala was forbidden to say more, but nobody thought to caution her not to laugh, and what did Lala do when she saw Marian playing the piano beside the circus parade, but laugh until the tears ran down her cheeks. Worst of all she waited on table with a broad smile on her face that made Aunt Amelia quite as uncomfortable as the mention of a pelican. Nor was it possible for Aunt Amelia to understand how a child who had been in disgrace all the forenoon, could be cheerful and ready to laugh on the slightest provocation. She thought it poor taste.

After dinner Ella thrust a repentant looking stocking in Marian's hand. "Papa says the things are yours and you must have them," she explained.

"What makes the stocking look so floppy?" asked Marian.

"Because," Ella went on, "papa made me take all the potatoes out and there wasn't much left. You've got a handkerchief in the

stocking from me and one from mamma, and——"

"Please don't tell me," protested Marian. "I want to be s'prised."

"Like the selfish child you are," put in Aunt Amelia, "unwilling to give your cousin a bit of pleasure."

"And a box of dominoes from papa and a doll's tea set Lala gave you," finished Ella.

"She'll expect a doll next," observed Aunt Amelia.

"I did think Santa Claus would give me one," admitted the child, "but I had rather have the beautiful tea set. Help me set the table on this chair, Ella, and we'll play Christmas dinner. I'll let you pour the tea and——"

"Ella has no time to play," her mother interrupted. "Come, little one, help mamma finish packing the baskets of presents for the poor children."

"But I had rather play with Marian's tea set," pouted Ella.

"You have one of your own, dearest."

"It isn't as nice as Marian's, though, and I want to stay here and play."

"Now you see, George," and Mrs. St. Claire turned to her husband, "now you see why I cannot allow these children to play together. You can see for yourself what an influence Marian has over our little Ella. Come, darling, have you forgotten the sleigh ride? It is time to get ready."

"Me too?" questioned Marian, springing to her feet, "shall I get ready?"

The child knew her mistake in less than a minute, but forgetting the uselessness of protest, she begged so earnestly to be taken with the children Aunt Amelia called her saucy, and as a punishment, the Christmas gifts, tea set and all, were put on a high shelf out of sight.

Marian was allowed to stand in the parlor by the window to see the sleigh-load of noisy children drive away. When they were gone, the parlor seemed bigger than usual and strangely quiet. Uncle George, with a frown on his face, was reading in the sitting-room. He didn't look talkative and the clock ticked

loud. Marian turned again to the parlor window. Across the street was the rich man's house, and in the front window of the rich man's house was a poor little girl looking out —a sad little girl with big eyes and a pale face. Marian waved her hand and the little girl waved hers—such a tiny, white hand. A new idea flashed into Marian's mind. She had often seen the little girl across the way and wondered why she never played with Ella. At last she thought she knew. The rich man's wife probably went to a hospital after the little girl, and took her home to get well just as Janey Clark was taken home, only Janey was never thin and delicate and Janey never stared quietly at everything as the little girl did who lived in the rich man's house.

Marian wondered why Aunt Amelia didn't leave her some of the presents in the baskets. Perhaps nobody loved the little girl: maybe her father and mother were dead and Santa Claus didn't know where to find her. Marian wished she had something to take to the poor thing. She would have given away her tea

set that minute had it been within reach. Just then a long-legged horse went by, a horse that looked so queer it reminded Marian of her potato menagerie. The child smiled at the thought. Perhaps the little girl in the rich man's house never saw a potato animal and would like to see one. Perhaps she would like two or three for a Christmas present. Why not? It was all Marian had to give and the animals were funny enough to make any poor little girl laugh. Up-stairs Marian flew, returning with the elephant, the rhinoceros, the hippopotamus and two zebras packed in a pasteboard box.

"Please, Uncle George," she asked, "may I go and visit the poor little girl that lives in the rich man's house? I want to say 'Wish you a merry Christmas' to her, and——"

"Run along, child," interrupted Uncle George, the frown smoothing out as he spoke, "go where you will and have a good time if it is possible—bless your sunny face."

Uncle George had heard of the rich man's house and he smiled a broad smile of amusement as he watched Marian climb the steps

and ring the bell. "What next?" he inquired as the door closed behind the child. In a short time he knew "What next." One of the rich man's servants came over with a note from the neighbor's wife, begging Uncle George to allow Marian to stay and help them enjoy their Christmas dinner at six. The permission was gladly given and at eight o'clock Marian came home hugging an immense wax doll and fairly bubbling over with excitement.

"I never had such a good time at the table in my life," she began, "as I did at the rich man's house. They asked me to talk, just think of it—asked me to, and I did and they did and we all laughed. And the poor little girl isn't poor, only just sick and she belongs to the folks. The rich man is her father and her name is Dolly Russel and she was gladder to see me than she ever was to see anybody in her life and she wants me to come again, and ——"

"And I suppose you told all you knew," snapped Aunt Amelia.

"Yes, most, 'specially at the table," admitted the child.

CHAPTER X

A GAME OF SLICED BIRDS

MARIAN was so happy with her doll and teaset the following day she was blind and deaf to all that happened in the house outside her little room. She didn't know that Mrs. Russel made her first call upon Aunt Amelia in the afternoon, nor that company was expected in the evening. Ella's mysterious airs were lost upon her. The child was accordingly surprised when she met the company at breakfast.

Aunt Hester, Mrs. St. Claire's younger sister, was a pleasant surprise because she was good-looking and agreeable. She returned Marian's smile of greeting with interest. Marian hoped she had found a friend and hovered near the welcome stranger until sent to her room. During the rest of the week she and Aunt Hester exchanged smiles when they met at the table, and to win a few kind

words from her became Marian's dream. New Year's Day brought an opportunity. Mrs. Russel sent a box of sliced birds to Marian and her cousin, and as the gift came while the family were at breakfast, Marian knew all about it. At last she and Ella owned something in common and might perhaps be allowed to play together. She could hardly wait to finish her breakfast.

"What are sliced birds and how do you play with them?" she asked Aunt Hester, who carried the box into the sitting-room.

"Well," began Aunt Hester, "can you read, Marian?"

"Yes, auntie, I can read pretty near anything I try to, but I can't write very good, not a bit good. Do you have to write in sliced birds?"

"No," was the laughing reply, "if you can spell a little that is all that is necessary. Here is a paper with a list of birds on it we can put together. Now here is the word jay. A picture of a jay is cut in three pieces, on one piece is 'J,' on another is 'A' and on the third is 'Y.' Now hunt for 'J.'"

"Ella knows her letters," Marian suggested. "Come, Ella, hunt for 'J,' that piece would have a blue jay's head on it, I guess." Marian waited until Ella found the letter and together they finished the blue jay. Both children were delighted with the result.

"Oh, what fun!" cried Marian. "We'll make all the birds, Ella. I'll read a name and tell you what letters to hunt for."

A shadow fell across the bright scene, caused by the entrance of Aunt Amelia. "Go over there and sit down," she said to Marian. "I came in to help Hester divide the game."

"Divide the game!" echoed both children.

"Oh, don't do it, please don't," besought Marian, "we want to play with all the birds together."

"It seems a pity," began Aunt Hester, but she gathered Ella in her arms and helped form all the birds in two straight lines upon the floor as her sister desired.

Marian watched with eager interest. She hoped when the birds were divided a few of the pretty ones might be given to her. If she had her choice she couldn't tell whether

she would take the peacock or the bird of paradise — they were both gorgeous. The scarlet tanager and the red-headed woodpecker were beautiful but of course it wasn't fair to wish for all the brightest birds. It was Aunt Hester who suggested a way to divide the game.

"Let them take turns choosing," she said. "It seems to me that will be perfectly fair. The children might draw cuts for first choice."

At that, Marian saw her opportunity. "Ella may be the first chooser," she declared, and was rewarded by a smile from Aunt Hester. Which would Ella take? the bird of paradise or the peacock? Either would please Marian, so it really made no difference which was left. Ella wanted them both and said so.

"Hush," whispered her mother, "if you keep still Marian won't know which birds are the prettiest. Aunt Hester and I will help you choose."

"I guess I'll take that," Ella decided, pointing towards the bird of paradise.

Marian was about to choose the peacock when a whispered word from Aunt Hester caught her ear.

"I hope, Ella dear, that she won't take the peacock."

Marian hesitated a moment. She wanted the peacock with its gay, spreading tail, but if Aunt Hester wished Ella to have it perhaps she would love whoever helped her get it. "I'll take the turkey," said the child, whereupon Ella gave a shout.

"She don't know much, she took an old brown turkey. I'll have the peacock and I want the red bird and the redhead."

Aunt Amelia laughed. "One at a time, you dear, impulsive child," said she, but Aunt Hester smiled across at Marian. "Your turn," she said.

"I'll take the owl," Marian quietly replied.

"Oh, ho! an old owl!" laughed Ella, clapping her hands for joy. "Now I'll have the redhead! goody! And next time——"

"Hush," warned her mother. "You mustn't let Marian know what you want or she'll take it."

"I choose the wren," came in low tones from Marian.

"My turn," Ella called. "Give me the redhead."

"Choose the flicker next," advised her mother, so Marian, still hoping to be loved, chose the robin.

Aunt Hester smiled again, but the smile was for Ella. "Take the parrot next," she whispered, so Marian chose the crow.

"Now, Ella, darling," whispered her mother, "the oriole, after Marian has her turn," and Marian, taking the hint, motioned for the jay.

It was over at last and Marian was told to go to her room. As she was leaving, Aunt Hester gave Ella a rapturous hug and said, "Our baby has all the prettiest birds." Aunt Hester didn't know Marian heard the remark until she saw the tears that could not be kept back, wetting the rosy cheeks. "Oh, you poor young one!" she exclaimed, and but for the presence of Aunt Amelia, she would have taken the sad little mortal in her arms.

"She's crying 'cause her birds are all homely," said Ella.

"Of course, she always wants the best," remarked Mrs. St. Claire, but Aunt Hester and Ella both gazed after the retreating figure of little Marian, with conscience-stricken faces. They had been three against one, and that one didn't know enough to take the choicest birds when she had the chance. They hadn't played fair.

Marian, blinded by tears, stumbled over a rug at the door of her room and the sliced birds slipped almost unheeded from her apron. The nearest seat was the box she called her piano stool. She dropped upon it and buried her face in her arms on the piano. The sheet music tumbled forward upon her head, perhaps fearing it might be but an old almanac forever after. Bitter thoughts filled the little soul. Why would no one love her? Why did the sound of her voice annoy every one so she feared to speak? What was the trouble? Was she so bad or so homely that no one might love her? She had tried to be good and tried to do right, but what difference had it made? Aunt Hester thought her stupid because she allowed Ella to take what birds

she would. Surely Aunt Hester was the stupid one.

It was impossible for Marian to feel miserable long at a time. In a few minutes she sat up and straightened her sheet music, whereupon the almanac became a hymn-book. She turned the leaves slowly as did the young lady who played the organ prayer-meeting nights. Then, addressing the wax doll and the bed posts she announced in solemn tones, "We'll sing nineteen verses of number 'leventy 'leven."

"Number 'leventy 'leven" happened to be "Come Ye Disconsolate," a hymn Marian was familiar with, as it was Aunt Amelia's favorite. The tune began dismally enough, but the disconsolate one took courage on the third line and sang out triumphantly at last, with a great flourish upon the piano, "'Earth has no sorrow that Heaven cannot heal.'" "Twenty Froggies Went to School" came next, and Marian was herself once more, which is to say, she became at a moment's notice, a famous musician, a school-teacher, a princess, a queen or whatever the occasion required, while the little room was easily

changed into anything from the Desert of Sahara to a palace.

The extent of Marian's knowledge was the only limit to the games she played. Pictures in the family Bible had given her many an hour of entertainment in the little room, thanks to the fact that Uncle George allowed Marian to look at the pictures on an occasional Sunday afternoon. The doll almost broke her nose the day before playing "Rebecca at the Well." The "Marriage at Cana" was a safer game for a wax doll that could not stand, especially as the doll made a beautiful bride. Turning from her piano, Marian saw something that made her laugh. The robin's head and the duck's feet had fallen one above the other.

"Poor robin," she said, "I guess you would rather have your own feet. R-o-b-i-n, I know how to spell you, and I'll put you on your own feet and I'll give the duck his own head so he can quack." When the robin was put together it looked like an old friend. "You're nicer than the bird of paradise, after all," declared Marian, "because I know you so well.

You and I used to be chums because I didn't have any little girls to play with."

It was something of a puzzle to put all of the birds together, but when the work was finished Marian was pleased. "You're all so nice and common looking," she said. "I never saw the owl bird, but we used to hear him in the woods at night, didn't we, blue jay? He used to go, 'Who—who—whoo—whoo!' We used to see you, old black crow, you always said 'Caw—caw—caw,' and you dear little wren, how I would like to hear you sing once more. Where are you all now? Somewhere way down South, because our teacher says so and when the snow is gone, you'll come flying back.

"Oh, now we'll play something. It is autumn over here on the rug, the rug's the orchard, and the leaves are falling and all the flowers are fading and winter is coming. You see that sunshiny spot on the floor over there under the windows, birdies? Well, that is down South where you are going. I don't remember who goes first but I guess the little wren better fly away now, and we'll have lots

of fun." One by one the birds went south, owl and all, and one by one they flew back to the orchard in the spring-time, where the wax doll welcomed them, listened to their songs and scattered strings about for them to use in building their nests.

It was a pleasant game and Marian was called to the dining-room before she thought of putting the birds away.

"I wonder if I didn't get the best half of the game after all," she suggested to the wax doll as she threw it a parting kiss.

Had Marian known that the bird of paradise, the peacock and the other bright ones were laid upon a shelf as birds of no consequence and that Ella had complained all the forenoon of having nothing to do, she would have understood why Aunt Hester not only greeted her with a smile, but said at the same time, "You dear, happy child."

It was enough that Aunt Hester said it and smiled, without puzzling for a reason. Surely Marian had chosen the better half of the game when such loving tones were meant for her. It was wonderful.

CHAPTER XI

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR

A YEAR passed away, in which time Marian was kept more and more outside of the family and more and more apart from all ordinary pleasures of childhood, but in spite of everything she was happy, ever hoping to win the approval of her aunt and uncle.

Going to school was a never-failing joy because at noon-times and recess there were girls and boys to play with, and the long walks to and from school were always a delight to a child who was interested in everything from a blade of grass to the clouds.

Ella attended a private school near home and was scarcely allowed to speak to Marian. She had many playmates, but all of them put together were not half so attractive from her point of view as the little cousin who played alone. One winter morning Ella told Marian behind the dining-room door that her grand-

mother and Uncle Robert were coming to stay all the spring-time and that Uncle Robert was a little boy only a few years older than Marian. Ella was delighted, but Marian wished Uncle Robert was a girl. She had reason for the wish before summer.

Marian was prejudiced against boys for as much as a year after Ella's uncle went away. He believed it was his privilege to tease little girls, though in all his life he never had such a chance to torment any one as he had that spring. It was useless to play tricks on Ella, because she ran crying to her mother and that made trouble for Robert: but Marian could appeal to no one and teasing her was safe and interesting. To hold her doll by the hair while Marian begged and screamed, was daily amusement until the child learned to leave the doll in her room. To hide her few books was another pleasure and to frighten her on every possible occasion until her eyes seemed fairly popping out of her head, was a victory.

Marian was glad to have some one to play with if that some one was a tyrant and often before her tears were dry, she was ready to

forgive Robert for teasing her and to join in any game he proposed. One day he suggested something that shocked Marian. He asked her to steal sugar. He didn't say steal, he said "Hook," and at first Marian didn't understand. Robert told her to sneak into the pantry after Lala was through work in the afternoon, take a lump of sugar from the barrel and give it to him. She wouldn't listen in the beginning, but by dint of persuasion and threats, Robert succeeded in getting his lump of sugar: not only one, but many, for stealing sugar became easier as the days went by and no one caught the small culprit.

Robert's ambition was to be a railroad engineer, and soon after the sugar stealing began, he made an engine of boxes and barrels in the locust grove. When it was finished and in running order, he allowed Marian to be his fireman. At first the child thought it was fun, but when she had shoveled air with a stick for five minutes without stopping, while Robert rang the bell, blew the whistle and ran the engine, she threw down her shovel.

"It's my turn to be engineer now," she declared.

"Girls don't know enough to run engines," was the reply.

"I'm not a girl," protested Marian, "I'm a fireman."

"Then tend to your job, why don't you?" was the retort. "I wouldn't ring the bell for my fireman if I didn't think he was a good one. Come, coal up, tend to business."

Somewhat flattered, the fireman smiled, shoveled coal until his arms ached, and then rebelled. "I say," she declared, "you've got to let me be engineer now! I won't be fireman another minute!"

"Oh, you won't?" taunted the engineer. "We'll see about that! Of course you needn't shovel coal for me if you don't want to, but you had better make up your mind pretty quick, because if you won't be my fireman, I'll go and tell my sister Amelia that you steal sugar!"

Marian was too stunned for words until Robert laughed. Then her face grew scarlet, and her eyes had a look in them the boy had never seen before.

"You dare not tell!" she screamed, leaning towards Robert, anger and defiance in every line of her slight figure. "I say you dare not!"

"I wonder why?" sniffed the boy.

"You know why; you told me to take the sugar, and I got it for you and I never tasted a bit of it. You were such an old pig you wouldn't give me back a crumb—old rhinoceros—hippopotamus—I'd call you an elephant too, only elephants are so much nicer'n you."

Again the boy laughed. "You hooked the sugar, didn't you?" he demanded.

"What if I did, didn't I do it 'cause you told me to, and didn't you eat it, you old gorilla?"

"What if I did, Miss Marian Spitfire? I'll say it's one of your lies, and no one will believe what you say. You know you can't look my sister in the face and tell her you didn't take the sugar, but I can stand up and cross my heart and hope to die if I ever saw any sugar, and they'll believe me and they won't believe you. Now will you shovel coal?

Toot-toot-toot—chew-chew-chew—ding-a-ling-a-ling—engine's going to start! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You mean thing, you horrid boy! I hate you!" sputtered Marian, but she shoveled coal. In fact the child shoveled coal the rest of the spring whenever Robert chose to play engine, until the day his taunts proved too much and she kicked his engine to pieces, threatening to "give it to him," if he didn't keep out of the way.

"Now tell," she screamed from the midst of the wreck, "tell anything you're a mind to, I don't care what you do."

Robert walked away whistling "Yankee Doodle." "I'm tired of playing engine," he called over his shoulder, "and I'm much obliged to you for saving me the trouble of taking it to pieces. I don't wonder nobody likes you. My sister Amelia knows what she's talking about when she says you've got the worst temper ever was! I bet you'll die in prison ——"

"You'll die before you get to prison if you don't get out of my sight," was the retort.

Robert walked away so fast Marian was cer-

tain he was going to tell about the sugar and she waited, defiantly at first, then tremblingly. What would become of her? What would they do? For reasons best known to himself, Robert didn't mention sugar, and after a few days of suspense, Marian breathed easier, although she wasn't thoroughly comfortable until Robert and his mother were on their way home.

A few weeks later Aunt Amelia made a jar of cookies for Ella's birthday party. She made them herself and put them on a low shelf in the pantry. Marian asked for a cookie and was refused. She didn't expect to get it. The more she thought of the cookies, the more she wanted one. She remembered the sugar. No one but Robert knew about that sugar, and if she helped herself to a cooky that would be her own secret. Marian took a cooky and ate it back of the orchard. Her old friends, the chipping sparrows, flew down for the crumbs that fell at her feet. The little birds were surprised when Marian frightened them away. She had been so kind to them they had lost all fear of her.

The second cooky Marian took she ate in the locust grove where she was much annoyed by the curiosity of a chipmunk. He asked her questions with his head on one side and his hand on his heart. His chatter made her angry. What was it to him if she happened to be eating a cooky? She did wish folks would mind their own business. From that day, Marian grew reckless. She carried away cookies two or three at a time and talked back to the birds and the squirrels and all the inhabitants of the orchard and the locust grove who were not polite enough to hide their inquisitiveness.

For once in her life, Marian had all the cookies she wished, although they agreed with neither her stomach nor her conscience. She didn't feel well and she was cross and unhappy. At last Marian knew that the day of reckoning was near at hand. She could almost touch the bottom of the cooky jar when she realized that the cookies had been made for Ella's party and had not been used upon the table. No one had lifted the cover of the jar but herself since the day they were

baked. It was a frightful thought. There was no more peace for Marian. Awake or dreaming, the cookies were ever before her. In school and at home they haunted her. What should she do, what could she do?

Quietly the child went about the house. She no longer sang nor laughed. Uncle George wondered, Aunt Amelia rejoiced. She thought Marian's usual high spirits unbecoming a child dependent upon charity, as Marian had often heard her remark.

"She may be working too hard in school," suggested Uncle George.

"Whatever is the cause she has behaved so well lately, I shall allow her in the sitting-room with the children when Ella has her party," conceded Aunt Amelia.

Even a shadow of kindness touched Marian's heart. Oh, why had she done wrong? From the depths of her soul, the child repented. Why had she been called bad in the days when she tried to be good, and at last when she was so bad, why would Aunt Amelia declare that there was a great improvement in her behavior, and why would Uncle George

speak to her almost as pleasantly as he did to Ella? If only she had remembered the words of Mrs. Moore before it was too late; to "Be good and to do right." Mrs. Moore also said, "Be brave." It would be brave to go to Aunt Amelia and tell her the truth about the cookies. Marian had not been good, she had not done right and she could not be brave.

Many and many a time the child studied the grim face of Aunt Amelia, repeating over and over to herself "Be brave." It seemed to Marian that if she attempted telling Aunt Amelia of her sin, she would die on the spot, choke to death, perhaps, trying to get the words out. Her throat closed tight together at the very thought. It might, under some circumstances, be possible to tell Uncle George, although to confess was to be forever an outcast. Neither Uncle George nor Aunt Amelia would ever love her, nor would she ever be allowed to play with Ella. All the golden texts Marian had ever learned, haunted her memory. "The way of the transgressor is hard." "Be sure your sin will find you out." "Enter not into the path of the wicked."

"Evil pursueth sinners." There were many others, so many, the child was sorry she had ever gone to Sunday-school.

The day of the party was bright and beautiful. All the little girls came who were invited, Ruth Higgins, Dorothy Avery and Dolly Russel among the number. Marian went into the sitting-room with drooping head and misery in her soul, until joining in the games and merriment, she forgot the cookies and had a good time. Not a thought of trouble disturbed her pleasure even though she heard Lala setting the table in the dining-room.

Her conscience awoke only when Aunt Amelia appeared to summon her into the kitchen. Every bit of color left the child's face. She could hear nothing clearly because of the ringing in her ears. As she followed Aunt Amelia through the dining-room the floor seemed rising up at every step and the candles on the birthday cake danced before her eyes. On the table in the kitchen was the empty cooky jar, the eloquent witness of her guilt. On a rosebud plate beside it were less

than a dozen cookies. Marian gazed stupidly at the jar and at the plate of cookies.

"What have you to say for yourself, Marian Lee?" Aunt Amelia's voice sounded far away. There were such lumps in Marian's throat she couldn't speak.

"Answer me," commanded Aunt Amelia, "what have you to say?"

Marian's tongue felt paralyzed. Perhaps it was unwilling to do its owner's bidding. It was certainly hard for that truthful little tougue to say the one word "Nothing." Aunt Amelia's face was terrible. "Do you mean to tell me that you haven't touched those cookies?"

There was no retreat. Marian nodded her head.

"Speak!" continued Aunt Amelia, "say yes or no? Do you dare to tell me that you didn't take the cookies?"

It was all Marian did dare to do and her reply was "Yes."

Aunt Amelia raised a long forefinger as she said, "Don't stand there and lie, Marian Lee, you took those cookies."

"I did not." Lala grew pale when she heard that answer and saw the terrified eyes of the child.

"Own up," she whispered as she passed the trembling sinner on her way to the dining-room.

Marian looked beseechingly at Aunt Amelia, but her face was hard and pitiless. The child dared not "Be brave." "I did not touch the cookies," she repeated again and again.

"How do you account for the disappearance of a whole jar of cookies, Marian, if you didn't eat them?" asked Uncle George upon his arrival.

Marian had not thought of accounting for the loss of the cookies, but she took a deep breath and made a suggestion. "I s'pose a hungry tramp took 'em."

The reply wasn't satisfactory. Uncle George frowned and Aunt Amelia smiled. The smile wasn't the kind she was in the habit of bestowing upon Ella. It was the sort that froze the blood in Marian's veins. She sank in a miserable little heap upon the floor and cried and cried.

"Reform school is the place for children who steal and lie," said Aunt Amelia.

Uncle George tried to make the child confess, but his efforts were vain. She would not. Threats were powerless. The more frightened Marian became the more vehemently she denied her guilt. Although it was Ella's birthday, and shouts of laughter could be heard from the sitting-room, Aunt Amelia produced a certain strap Marian was familiar with through past experience. "Spare the rod, spoil the child," was Mrs. St. Claire's favorite motto so far as her husband's small relative was concerned.

"You can whip me till I die," sobbed Marian when she saw the strap, "but I can't say I took the cookies, because I didn't. How can I say I did, when I didn't?" Nor could Aunt Amelia nor Uncle George compel the child to say anything different.

"You can whip me till I die," she insisted over and over, "but I can't say I took those cookies," and they finally believed her.

"Go to bed," commanded Aunt Amelia. "I

don't want to see a child who could die easier than she could tell the truth. Go!"

A smothered sob caught Marian's ear. Lala was crying; and because Lala cried and was soon after found in Marian's room trying to quiet her, she was sent away the next day. Tilly was her successor. Before she had been in the house a week, she openly befriended Marian. "Poor little thing," she said, "if you had stolen a barrel of cookies from a baker you wouldn't have deserved half of the punishment you get. There isn't anything left they can do to you, is there?"

"Yes, they can send me to the reform school," was the reply, "and, oh, dear, I'm afraid to go. What will become of me?"

"If I were you," Tilly advised, "and I took the cookies, I would own up. They can't any more than kill you and I guess they'll do that anyway."

Marian shook her head. The time to own up was long passed. She stayed in her room and ate bread and water a week without protest. On Sunday afternoon she listened to the story of Ananias and Sapphira with teeth

and fists tightly closed. She heard long speeches on the fearful consequences of stealing and lying, without a word. Only when questioned would she say in low spiritless tones, "I did not touch the cookies."

When it was all over, and Aunt Amelia and Uncle George gave up trying to wring a confession from her and the child was simply in disgrace, her own conscience began its work. It gave her no peace. Marian had said her prayers every night as Mrs. Moore had taught her when she was a baby; but she had repeated them quickly with her back turned towards heaven and had made no mention of cookies. At last, troubled by her conscience, and not knowing where to turn for comfort, Marian knelt by her bedside one night and tried an experiment.

"O Lord," she began, "I am not going to lie to you about the cookies. Thou knowest I took them. That is why I haven't said any made up prayers for so long. I knew Thou knewest how wicked I am and I know what the Bible says about lying lips. I am afraid of Aunt Amelia or I would own up. She

says I won't go to heaven when I die because I am too bad to live there. Now, O Lord, I know I could be good in heaven, but it has been hard work on earth, and after I took the cookies I got wickeder and wickeder, but honest and truth I'll never do anything wrong again and I'll never tell another lie. Thou knowest I could be good in heaven. Please, O Lord, forgive me and take me straight up to heaven when I die. Amen."

That prayer didn't help Marian a bit. She could scarcely get off her knees when she had said "Amen." Her head seemed bowed down beneath a weight of cookies.

"You know what you must do," insisted her conscience, "you must go to your Uncle George and your Aunt Amelia first, first, I say."

"But I can't do that, and I'm so unhappy," sobbed Marian, but her conscience was pitiless. It would allow no compromise. "Oh, if I could see Nanna," whispered Marian as she crept into bed. No one had ever kissed her good-night but once since she had left the Home, and now, no one ever would again. The Father in heaven had turned away His

face. Marian cried herself to sleep as she had many a night before.

In the middle of the night she awoke and sat up in bed, cold and trembling. Thunder was rolling through the sky and an occasional flash of lightning made the little room bright one minute and inky black the next. Perhaps the end of the world was coming when the graves would give up their dead and the terrible Judge would descend to deal with the wicked. A crash of thunder shook the house. Marian dived beneath the blankets, but a horrible thought caused her to sit bolt upright again. Aunt Amelia had told her that sinners, on the last day, would call for the rocks and mountains to fall upon them. Perhaps hiding beneath blankets meant the same thing. Another crash came and a blinding flash of lightning. Then another and another. Springing from her bed, Marian ran down the hall to Mrs. St. Claire's room. The door was closed but the room was lighted.

"Oh, let me come in," she cried, knocking frantically at the door and keeping her eye upon the crack of light at the bottom.

The response was immediate. Aunt Amelia stepped into the hall and closed the door behind her. "Go back to your room," she said, "and don't you dare leave it again. I should think you would expect the lightning to strike you!"

Marian shrank back as a flash of lightning illumined the hall. For one moment she saw Aunt Amelia, tall and terrible in her white night-dress, her voice more fearful than the thunder, and her form seeming to stretch upward and upward, growing thinner and thinner until it vanished in the awful darkness.

Marian fled, closing the door of her little room and placing a chair against it. Kneeling by the window, she closed her eyes to shut out glimpses of the unnatural garden below and the angry sky above. The thought of sudden death filled her with terror. What would become of her soul if she died with her sins unconfessed? "Dear Father in heaven," she cried, "if you have to kill me with lightning, forgive me and take me to heaven. I'll be good there. I'll never steal anything there nor ever lie again. I was going to own

up to Aunt Amelia, but O Lord, I was so afraid of her I didn't dare. If you'll let me live through this night, I'll go and tell her in the morning and then I'll never do wrong again. O Lord, I'm so sorry, and I'm awful afraid of lightning. I don't want to die by it, but if I have to, please take me up to heaven. Amen."

Then Marian went back to bed. Her conscience didn't say a word that time and she went to sleep before the storm was over, long before Ella was quieted or ever Aunt Amelia closed her eyes.

Marian's first waking thought when she looked out on the fresh brightness of another day was one of thankfulness. It was good to be alive. Another second and she groaned. Perhaps she would have been dead but for that midnight promise, the promise she must keep. Marian dressed quickly and sought Aunt Amelia before she lost courage. She wasn't gone long. Back she flew to the little room where her prayer was short although her sobs were long.

"Oh, Lord, I couldn't, I just couldn't."

There were many thunder-storms that summer and for a while every one of them frightened Marian. In the night, she would resolve to confess, but daylight took away her courage. "If I should be sick a long time," Marian argued, "perhaps then Aunt Amelia would like me some and just before I died I could shut my eyes and tell her about the cookies. Then God would surely forgive me and I would go straight up to heaven and it would be all right. But if I should die suddenly, before I had any time to say any last words, what would become of me?" she asked herself. After thinking of it some time, Marian hit upon a plan that brought her peace of mind. She wrote the following confession:

"Nobody knows how much I have suffered on account of some cookies. I used to like cookies but not now. It began by sugar. I took lumps of sugar out of a barrel for a boy. I thought if I could take sugar I could take cookies, too, and I did, but I said I didn't. I did take the cookies. I hope my folks will forgive me now I am dead. I suffered awful

before I died on account of cookies. Give my wax doll and all my things to Ella. The doll is good if I wasn't. I tried but it is hard for some children on earth. I am awful sorry on account of being so much trouble to everybody. I took those cookies. Marian Lee."

Having folded this paper, Marian was happier than she had been for weeks. She felt that she had saved her soul.

CHAPTER XII

MARIAN'S DIARY

"JUNE 20.—It is hard to begin a diary. You don't know what to say first. Bernice Jones says a diary is a book to put the weather in. She ought to know on account of her grandmother keeping one. Leonore Whiting, the girl that sits behind me and wears the prettiest ribbons in school, says a diary is to put your feelings in. Leonore thinks she ought to know because her sister is a poetry writer.

"When I asked Uncle George for an empty diary and what you write in it, he laughed and said he would give me all the paper I wanted to write things in and I had better put down everything. He said it would be a good thing for me to write more and talk less, so I guess I will have the fullest diary of any of the Diary Club. That's our name. Maud Brown was the one that got up the name.

She says everybody belongs to a Club. Her mother does and her father and her brothers too. Maud says she has got to be in a Club or she never will be happy. She is only going to keep weather because she doesn't like to write. Leonore and a lot of the other girls are just going to keep a few feelings, but I am going to write down weather and feelings and everything.

"The weather is all right to-day.

"It is too bad about vacation. It is almost here and then I won't have anybody to play with. Uncle George says he never saw a little girl like to go to school as well as I do. It really isn't school I like to go to, it is recesses. I guess he had some other boys to play with when he was little or he would know. I would like to play with Dolly Russel but my aunt never will let me go over there and she tells Dolly's mother 'No,' about everything she wants me to do. She did let Ella go, only they don't invite Ella any more. I wonder if she talked too much, or broke anything, or why? Lala works over there now, but my aunt told me not to talk to Lala so I don't dare.

"I found out something to-day at school. The children that live in houses don't all go to bed in the dark. I cried and cried when I first had to go to bed in the dark because where I used to live, we didn't have to. I wish I could sit up late at night.

"Another thing about a diary is how nice it will be for your grandchildren to know what you used to think about and what you used to do. I can hardly believe that I am the grandmother of my own grandchildren, but of course it is so.

"June 21.—We took our diaries to school. I had the most written of anybody, but I don't think it is nice to read your diary out loud because they ask questions. The girls wanted to know where I used to live and I wanted to tell them but I didn't dare to, and now I wonder about things. Louise Fisher said that Dolly Russel's mother told her mother that my aunt is not good to me, and a good many more things, and they are all sorry for me and they say it is too bad I can't have pretty clothes like Ella. I didn't say much because I don't want everybody in

school to know how bad I am and that nobody can love me, and about the cookies. I guess I would die if they knew it all. Their mothers wouldn't let them play with me at recess.

"I wish I had a white dress to wear the last day of school when I sing a song alone and speak my piece. I don't like to sing and speak pieces because I am afraid. I am not going to take my diary to school any more.

"June 22.—I don't know what to think. I heard some more things about me at school to-day. Folks wonder who I am and where I came from, and Louise Fisher says she knows Uncle George is not my own uncle and if she was me she would run away. I can't run away because I don't know where to run to and I am afraid. Ella knows things about me and if she ever gets a chance I guess she will tell me, but her mother won't let her speak to me if she can help it. I guess her mother doesn't know how hard I try to set Ella a good example of being polite and not slamming doors and speak when you're spoken to, and children should be seen and not heard,

and if you behave as well as you look you'll be all right.

"I know it was bad about the cookies, but Ella never can do a cooky sin because her mother always says to her, 'Help yourself, darling,' and that's different. Besides that, Ella thinks a tramp did take the cookies. I will tell her some time because she cried and was sorry I had so much trouble. Then she will never speak to me again, but it is better to tell the truth than to do any other way. When I think I am going to die, sure, then I will tell my aunt if it kills me.

"I wonder if Uncle George is my uncle or what?

"June 23.—It was the last day of school to-day. I sung my song and spoke my piece and Dolly Russel's mother kissed me. I wish she was my mother. I wish I had a mother. I am glad she kissed me. Aunt Amelia wasn't there. Ella cried because she couldn't go. It didn't rain. You don't think about weather when it is nice.

"September 5.—The queerest thing happened. I thought I would be the one that

would write the most in my diary this summer, but I wasn't, and good reason why. It was just a little after daylight the day after the last day of school, that Aunt Amelia came and called me and told me to get dressed quick, and she gave me all clean clothes to put on and I was frightened. I said what had I done and she said I had done enough. I was scared worse than ever. She told me to go down in the kitchen and I would find some breakfast ready. I thought I couldn't eat, everything was so queer and early, but I did, and then I had to put on my hat and Uncle George said, 'Are you ready?' I said where am I going, is it reform school, and Aunt Amelia said it ought to be, and then I got in a carriage with Uncle George and the driver put a little new trunk on behind and we drove to the depot.

"It was awful early and the grass and the trees looked queer and the birds were singing like everything. Uncle George told me to cheer up, I was going to a nice place where I would have a good time, and he told me to write to him every week and he would write

to me. He said I mustn't tell the folks where I was going that I was ever bad. He said he thought I was a pretty good little girl, and when he put me on the train and told the conductor where I was going and to take care of me, because I was his little girl, I put my arms around his neck and kissed him good-bye. He is a good man. I hope he is my uncle, but I don't know.

"Well, I had a nice time in that village where I went and Uncle George came after me yesterday. I was glad to see him, but I didn't want to come home. I wanted to stay and go to the country school, but he said that my grandchildren would want their grandmother to know something.

"Then he told me he found my diary and that he put it away where nobody could see it until I got back. He said he thought he had better tell me to keep my diary out of sight, because that was the style among diary-writing folks. So I will hide my diary now. I wonder if he read it. Anyway, I know Aunt Amelia didn't get a chance, because he told me most particular about how he found

it first thing and put it where it wouldn't get dusty. He says he is my Uncle George. I was afraid maybe I was just adopted for a niece, and I am not sure yet. He didn't say he wasn't my adopted Uncle George, and maybe he thought I was his brother's little girl when I wasn't. The folks I stayed with told Uncle George I am a lovely child. He didn't look surprised, only glad.

"September 6.—All the girls had new dresses at school. I am in the fourth grade this term. I am in fractions and on the map of South America. We played London Bridge and King William at recess.

"September 7.—Too many things to play after school. Can't write. Aunt Amelia makes me get straight to bed after I come to my room at night. It doesn't seem like night, though. I don't like to go to bed in the afternoon very well, but after all, I am glad it doesn't get dark early. I go to sleep in the daytime and wake up in the daytime and the birds are always singing.

"September 8.—Nothing happened in school to-day. It rains and I can't go out in the

orchard. I was going to play 'Landing of the Pilgrims,' but I guess I will write in my diary. Where I was this summer they had a library, not a big one like the one downstairs, but the shelves were low so I could reach the books, and the folks let me read all I wanted to. I was pretty glad of it, rainy days and Sundays.

"The book I liked best was full of stories about the Norsemen. They gave me the book to keep. I take it way up in the top of my favorite apple-tree and read and read. Sometimes I play I'm Odin and sometimes I am Thor. I am not so afraid of thunder since I read about Thor. When it thunders and lightens I play I am an old Norseman and that I really believe Thor is pounding with his big hammer and that he is scaring the bad frost giants. I am glad Aunt Amelia says she never read Norse stories. If she had, she would call me Loki, so there's somebody that's bad she can't say I am.

"What I like best is to sit in the top of the apple-tree and shut the book and think about the Rainbow Bridge that stretched from earth

to heaven. Every one couldn't cross, but if my father and my mother were on the other side of the shining bridge, I would look straight towards them and I wouldn't look down and my mother would hold out her arms and I wouldn't be afraid. May be the Rainbow Bridge is wide. I am sure it is when I stop to think, because the gods used to drive over it when they came to visit the earth. Perhaps they would let me cross if they saw me coming because it was only the bad giants they tried to keep out of heaven. Oh, dear, I guess I am a bad giant myself, even if I am little, because the book says, 'The giants in old Norse times were not easy to conquer: but generally it was when they hid themselves behind lies and appeared to be what they were not that they succeeded for a time.' I hid myself behind lies.

"September 9.—One sure thing, I will always tell the truth as long as I live. I didn't come straight home from school to-night. A lot of us girls went in the old cemetery and read what's on the tombstones, and I didn't get home early. I tried to get through the

gate when my aunt wasn't looking, but that would have been what you call good luck. She took me in and said, 'Where have you been?' I said, 'In the graveyard.' She said, 'Why didn't you stay there?' I didn't know what to answer so I kept still. Then my aunt said, 'You can't go out to play,' and that was all. So I am always going to tell the truth and feel comfortable inside, no matter what happens. I was more afraid of how I would feel when it was time to say my prayers if I told a lie, than I was of my aunt.

"September 10.—I didn't get home early to-night because I walked around the pond with Louise Fisher and Maud Brown. I owned up when I got home. I am not going to write down what happened, but it was worse than just being sent to your room. I don't want my little grandchildren to read about it. I am coming straight home next Monday night.

"September 11.—Aunt Amelia says I act worse all the time. I don't know what I did that was bad to-day, but I got scolded all the time.

"September 12.—Went to church and Sunday-school and the boys made fun of my shoes. They couldn't make me cry. I should think I would get used to being made fun of because I have to wear a sunbonnet to school and all the other little girls wear hats. I wear my sunbonnet as far as my aunt can see and then I take it off and swing it by the strings. She would be angry if she knew. I would almost rather be baldheaded than wear a sunbonnet when all the other girls wear hats. I wish I could have pretty shoes for Sundays, but I won't let the boys know I care.

"September 13.—I came straight home tonight. I wish school began at daylight and didn't let out till dark, there is so much trouble at home. Uncle George says it is all on account of me.

"September 14.—I came straight home and got scolded.

"September 15.—Got scolded again.

"September 16.—Got scolded some more.

"September 17.—Got put to bed without any supper on account of sitting down by the side of the pond to watch a frog. It was a

funny frog and when I had to go to bed, I went to sleep thinking about it. When it was almost dark Uncle George came and woke me up to give me something to eat. He didn't scold. I am writing this the next morning for yesterday.

"September 18.—It was a beautiful Saturday. My aunt had company and I played out in the orchard all day long. Ella and my aunt and the company went to drive in the afternoon so there wasn't anybody to scold me. I saw the mole to-day. He came out and walked around a little. I guess he knew my aunt was gone. Everything was happy in the orchard. I watched a caterpillar a long time. He went so fast he made me laugh. I guess he was going home from school and wanted to get there in time.

"September 19.—This is Sunday. Uncle George called me in the parlor to sing for the company and some other folks that came. Aunt Amelia played on the piano and when she couldn't play any more on account of a cramp in her wrist, they told me to sing without any music and I did. The company wiped away

some tears, and she said I could sing just the way my father did when he was a little boy, and then she took me in her lap and said she thought I looked like my mother. I was going to ask some questions, but my aunt said not to talk about some things, and then the company said it was going to rain, she guessed, and would I sing another song. I did and then my aunt sent me to my room, cross. I mean she was cross. I felt pretty bad at first but I got over it.

"September 20.—Ella says there is a picture of my father in the album, and she will show it to me first chance she gets.

"September 21.—My aunt was away when I got home from school so Ella said, 'Now's your chance,' and we went into the parlor and she showed me the picture. I smiled back at the face because it smiled at me. My father is pleasant and kind.

"September 22.—I went in the parlor and looked at the picture again. I was afraid my aunt would come in and find me.

"September 23.—It happened to-day. I was looking at the picture and my aunt came

in still and caught me. She said dreadful things, and I cried and I don't know what I did, but she said I was saucy and she didn't know what to do with me. Uncle George heard the noise and came in and he scolded, too. I never saw him so cross. I almost thought he was angry with Aunt Amelia, but of course that was not so. At last he took my father's picture out of the album and gave it to me, and told me to keep it, and he told me not to go in my aunt's parlor because she didn't want me there. I knew that before, because I wanted to take lessons on the piano same as Ella, and she wouldn't let me.

"I am so glad I have my father's picture. It is like having folks of your own to have a picture of somebody that was yours. I haven't missed a single question in school on the map of South America. I guess that is one map I can't forget. I wish I knew where my father went in South America. I don't dare ask Uncle George. He says I am the trial of his life, and he doesn't see why I don't behave like other children.

"October 1.—I am getting so I don't care what happens to me. I don't come straight home from school any more. I always think I will until I get started home, and then I dread to come because nobody loves me and I will get scoldings and things anyway, so I stop and look at toads and frogs and have a good time before I get home, and sometimes nothing happens. My aunt says I tell things, but I don't. What would I tell for? I don't even write sad things in my diary because I don't want to make my grandchildren cry. It would make me feel pretty bad if I found out that nobody loved my grandmother.

"October 2.—Had a lovely time playing Pocahontas in the grove.

"October 3.—I tried to count the stars last night, but I couldn't. I wonder why we don't fall off the earth when China's on top? Aunt Amelia says I ought to know better than to ask her questions. I do.

"October 20.—I listened to what the minister said to-day. It was about heaven. I've got to try to be awful good on earth so I can surely go there. Then I guess somebody will

love me and when I walk in through one of the pearly gates, the angels won't look cross.

"October 21.—You get tired of keeping your diary. I am going to write a book. Its name will be 'The Little Daughter of Thor.' I guess Thor never had a little girl, but I am going to write it in a book that he did, and one day when the little girl was a baby and she was playing with the golden apples, she fell right through the sky on to the earth. Then I am going to write about how the little girl watched for the Rainbow Bridge. She was a little stray child on earth, and even the giants were kind to her. Of course Thor's little daughter would know enough to know that the only way home was over the blue and golden Rainbow Bridge that she couldn't see only sometimes.

"At the end of the story, Thor himself will find the little girl and will take her in his chariot across the Rainbow Bridge to the shining bright city in the clouds where her mother will hug her pretty near to pieces. Maybe when I get the book done, I will write another about what Thor's little daugh-

ter did when she got home. About the songs she used to sing with her mother, and the flowers they used to pick and about everything that is happiness. It will be nicer to do than keeping an old diary about real things.

"The nicest looking man's picture I ever saw is my father, so I am going to have him for Thor. My father looks kind and smiling, but he looks, too, as if he would know how to use Thor's big hammer if the bad giants tried to cross the Rainbow Bridge. I think it is queer that I like the god of thunder so well that I will let him have my father's face in my book.

"October 22.—I am going to put some last words in my diary, just to say that it is a good thing to write a book. Something dreadful happened after school to-night. I felt dreadful, nobody knows. I got over it though, and then because I had to stay in my room and have dry bread and water for my supper, I started my book and it was lots of fun. It is the best thing there is to do when you want to forget you are a little girl

that nobody loves. If I live here until I am an old lady I presume I will turn into an author.

"If it wasn't for the orchard and the locust grove and the way home from school, and recesses and my doll and my books, and the birds and the wild flowers and the lovely blue sky I can see from my window this minute, and a good many other things, I would wish I had died when I was a baby. That makes me laugh. It is a nice world to live in after all. A beautiful world."

CHAPTER XIII

DIPHTHERIA

EARLY in the winter, diphtheria broke out in the schools. Marian said little about it at home, fearing she might not be allowed to go, though the daily paper told the whole story. Why the schools were not closed was a question even in the long ago days when Marian was a child. Uncle George was indignant, but influenced by his wife's arguments, he allowed Marian to have her way. Mrs. St. Claire said Marian was better off in school than at home, and in no more danger of catching diphtheria than she would be hanging over the fence talking to passing children. Marian didn't tell her Uncle George that she was never allowed to speak to passing children. He might have kept her home.

Weeks passed and many little ones died. The schoolroom became a solemn place to Marian. It seemed strange to look at empty

seats and know that the ones who used to sit in them would never come to school again. Even the boys were quieter than ever before. There were no longer paper wads flying the minute the teacher's back was turned, perhaps because the chief mischief maker's curly head was missing. He was Tommy Jewel, and he made things lively at the beginning of the term.

Marian felt that it was something to have known so many girls and boys who died. At recess in the basement she used to ask children from the other rooms how many of their number were missing. Marian felt so well and full of life it never entered her head that she might be taken ill herself, and the thought of death was impossible, although she often closed her eyes and folded her hands, trying to imagine her school-days were over.

At home the children met but seldom after the outbreak of diphtheria. Marian ate her breakfast alone and Ella had hers when the little cousin had gone to school. It was easily possible for Mrs. St. Claire to keep the

children entirely separate. To guard Ella from all danger of contagion was her daily care and the smell of burning sulphur was ever present in the house.

One morning Marian's throat was sore and she felt ill. The child dressed quickly and went down to tell Uncle George. Tilly the maid was at her home on a short visit, and Uncle George was building the kitchen fire.

"I've got the diphtheria," announced Marian, and there was terror in her face.

"Let me look in your throat," said Uncle George. "Why it looks all right, Marian, just a little red."

"I don't care, I feel sick all over," insisted the child, "and I tell you now and then, I know I've got it."

When Aunt Amelia was called she said Marian imagined that her throat was sore and as Marian ate breakfast, she was sent to school. The child went away crying. She didn't swing her little dinner pail around and around that morning just to show that she could do it and keep the cover on. Uncle

George was inclined to call her back, but Aunt Amelia laughed at him.

"Any child," argued Mrs. St. Claire, "that could eat the breakfast she did, isn't at death's door, now you mark my words. She has let her imagination run away with her. Our darling Ella is far more apt to have diphtheria than that child. She would be willing to have the disease to get a little sympathy."

Marian felt better out in the fresh air and as she met Ellen Day soon after leaving home, the way to school seemed short. The chief ambition of Marian's school life was to sit on a back seat, yet from the beginning, it had been her lot to belong to the front row. The teachers had a way of putting her there and Marian knew the reason. It wasn't because she was the smallest child in the room, although that was the truth. Tommy Jewel used to sit on a front seat, too, and once Marian had to share the platform with him. The teacher said they were a good pair and the other children laughed. Possibly the memory of Tommy's mischievous face caused the teacher to notice how quiet Marian was

the morning her throat was sore. The child sat with her elbows on her desk, her face in her hands, staring solemnly into space.

"Are you ill, Marian?" asked the teacher.

"No, Miss Beck," the child answered, recalling her aunt's remarks.

At last, conscious of pathetic eyes following her about the room and having heard of Aunt Amelia, the teacher again questioned Marian. "What is the trouble, little girl? Is there anything you would like to do? Would you like to write on the blackboard?"

Marian's face lighted. "I wish I could sit in that empty back seat all day," she eagerly suggested.

The teacher smiled. "You may pack your books, Marian, and sit there until I miss you so much I shall need you down here again."

Marian knew what that meant. "I'll be awful good," she promised. "I mean, I'll be ever so good."

So Marian sat in a back seat that last day and in spite of her sore throat and headache, she was happy. It was triumph to sit in a back seat. She was glad the children looked

around and smiled. They might get bad marks for turning their heads, to be sure, but what of it? At recess Marian walked across the schoolroom once or twice, then returned to her seat. At noon she refused to go to the basement with the children to eat her luncheon. In fact, she couldn't eat. Marian wondered why time seemed so long.

When the history class was called to the recitation seat early in the afternoon, one little girl was motionless when the signals were given.

"Marian Lee's asleep," volunteered the child who sat in front of her.

At that, Marian raised her head and stumbled to her class.

"Don't you feel well?" asked the teacher.

Marian shook her head. Her cheeks were crimson. She had never felt so wretched.

"Don't you think you had better go home?" continued Miss Beck.

"Oh, no," answered the child in tones of alarm. "Oh, she wouldn't let me come home before school is out."

"There, there, don't cry," begged the

teacher. "You may go back to your seat if you wish."

Marian did so and was soon asleep again. At recess she awoke to find herself alone in the room with Miss Beck.

"You had better go home, dear," the teacher urged. "I am sure you are ill. Let me help you put on your coat and hood."

"I can't go home until school is out," and Marian began to cry.

"Why not?"

"Because on account of my aunt. She wouldn't let me come home."

"But you are ill, Marian."

"She won't let me be sick," was the sobbing reply, "and I don't dare go home. You don't know my aunt. I guess I feel better. I want to go where it isn't so hot."

The teacher was young and hopeful. "Perhaps you will feel better if you go out to play," was her reply.

Instead of going out of doors, Marian went into the basement and joined in a game of blind man's buff. Only a few minutes and she fell upon the floor in a dead faint. When

the child opened her eyes she found herself the centre of attraction. The basement was quiet as though the command had been given to "Form lines." A strange teacher was holding Marian and Miss Beck was bathing her face with a damp handkerchief. Her playmates stood about in little groups, whispering the dread word "Diphtheria." Miss Beck came to her senses and ordered the children into the fresh air. How to send Marian home was the next question. The child listened to the various suggestions and then, struggling to her feet declared that she would walk home alone. She couldn't imagine what her aunt might say if she did anything else.

The child had her way. Through the gate and down the road she went alone. The journey was long and the wind was cold. The little feet were never so weary as that December day. It seemed to Marian that she could never reach home. Finally she passed the church. Seven more houses after that, then a turn to the right and two more houses. If she dared sit down on the edge of the sidewalk and rest by the way, but that wouldn't

do. "I could never stir again," she thought and plodded on.

At last she reached her own gate and saw Ella at the window. Would Aunt Amelia scold? It would be good to get in where it was warm, anyway. Oh, if Aunt Amelia would open the front door and say, "Come in this way, Marian," but she didn't and the child stumbled along a few more steps to the back entrance. She was feeling her way through the house when Aunt Amelia stopped her in the dining-room.

"Don't come any further," said she. "I have callers in the parlor. What are you home in the middle of the afternoon for?"

"I've got the diphtheria," the child replied, and her voice was thick.

Aunt Amelia made no reply but returned immediately through the sitting-room to the parlor.

"I guess she knows I'm sick now," Marian whispered as she sank into a chair by the table and pushed her dinner pail back to make room for her aching head. The callers left. Marian heard the front door open and close.

Then Aunt Amelia hastily entered the dining-room, threw a quantity of sulphur upon the stove and went back, closing the door behind her. Another door closed and Marian knew that her aunt was in the parlor with Ella.

The child choked and strangled and called to her aunt. She tried to walk and couldn't stand. The fumes of burning sulphur grew stronger and stronger. The air was blue. Marian became terrified as no one replied to her calls, but in time a merciful feeling of rest and quiet stole over her and her head fell forward upon the table.

For a long time she knew nothing. Then came dreams and visions. Part of the time Marian recalled that she was home from school early and that she had not taken off her hood and coat. Again she wondered where she was and why it was so still. Then came an awful dread of death. Where was everybody and what would become of her? The thought of death aroused Marian as nothing else had done. Would she be left to die alone? She remembered that some of her schoolmates

were ill with diphtheria but a few hours before the end came. Where was Aunt Amelia? Had she gone away from the house? Marian could not lift her head and when she tried to call her aunt her voice was a smothered whisper. What she suffered before her uncle came was a story long untold. Things happened when Uncle George walked into the house. He aired the room and there was wrath in his voice as he demanded explanations.

"Have patience a minute more, little girl, and it will be all right," he said to Marian, as he brought a cot into the room and quickly made a bed. Then he undressed her, put her in bed and grabbed his hat.

"Oh, don't leave me," begged Marian, "please don't, Uncle George, I'm awful sick and I'm afraid when I'm alone."

"I'm going for the doctor," was the reply; "lie still and trust Uncle George."

The man was gone but a moment and soon after he returned, the doctor came. It was no easy matter to look in Marian's throat. It needed more than the handle of a spoon to hold down the poor little tongue.

"Am I going to die right off?" demanded the child. "Oh, if I can only live I'll be so good. I'll never do anything bad again. Tell me quick, have I got to die to-night?"

For a time it seemed useless to try to quiet the little girl. "Oh, I'm afraid to die," she moaned, "I don't dare to die. Aunt Amelia says I won't go to heaven and I'm afraid. I don't want to tell what she does say. Oh, Uncle George, don't let me die. Tell the doctor you want me to get well. Tell him I'll be good."

Uncle George sat down and covered his face with his hands when Marian told him she couldn't hear what he said, that it was dark and she wanted more light so she could see his face that she might know if he was angry. Then she called for Aunt Amelia, and Aunt Amelia would not come; she was afraid of the diphtheria.

"But if I'm going to die, I've got to tell her," cried the child, clutching at the air, and it was some time before Uncle George understood.

"Child, child, don't speak of cookies," he

begged, "that was all right long ago;" but the assurance fell upon unheeding ears.

The nurse came and went up-stairs to prepare a room for Marian. The woman's appearance convinced the child that there was no hope—she was surely going to die. Uncle George groaned as he listened to her ravings.

At last the doctor put down his medicine case and drew a chair close beside the cot. He was a big man with a face that little children trusted. He took both of Marian's small, burning hands in one of his and told her she must look at him and listen to what he had to tell her. Uncle George moved uneasily. He thought the doctor was about to explain to Marian that unless she kept more quiet, nothing would save her, she would have to die. The man was surprised when he heard what the kind physician said. He talked to Marian of the friend of little children and of the beautiful home beyond the skies. Nor would he allow her to interrupt, but patiently and quietly told her over and over that the One who took little children up in His arms and blessed them, didn't ask whether they

were good or bad. He loved them all. The sins of little children were surely forgiven.

The troubled brain of the child grasped the meaning at last. There was nothing to fear. She closed her eyes and was quiet for a few moments. When she began to talk again, it was of summer mornings and apple-blossoms, of the wild birds and the chipmunk that lived in the locust grove. Many days passed before Marian realized anything more: then she knew that Uncle George took care of her nights and the nurse came every morning.

"Where is my aunt?" asked the child. "Doesn't she come up here?"

"Your aunt and little cousin," replied the nurse, "stay by themselves in the front part of the house down-stairs. They are afraid of the diphtheria."

Marian stared at the wall. She was glad to know there was no danger that Aunt Amelia might walk in, but somehow it seemed better not to tell the nurse.

"Am I going to die?" she asked.

The question came so suddenly the nurse

was taken by surprise. "Why—why we hope not," was the reply.

Something in the tones of the woman's voice impressed the truth upon Marian's mind. She was far more likely to die than to live. "I only wanted to know," she remarked, "I'm not afraid any more. I only hope I won't be a grown up angel the first thing. I should like to be a little girl with a mother and live in one of the many mansions for a while, like other children. I'd pick flowers in the front yard."

Soon after, the child fell asleep. When she awoke she was delirious, talking continually about the Rainbow Bridge. The doctor came, but it was hours before the Rainbow Bridge faded away and Marian was quiet. That was the day the little pilgrim seemed near the journey's end. Until sunset, Uncle George watched each fluttering breath. In the silent room below, Ella wept bitterly and Aunt Amelia waited to hear that the little soul was gone. She waited calmly, declaring that she had done her duty by the child up-stairs.

Marian lived. A few weeks more and Aunt

Amelia heard her ringing laugh and knew that she was happy. At last Marian was well enough to leave her room but it was days and days after the house was fumigated before she was allowed to see Ella or sit at the table with the family. Everything seemed changed. The rooms were brighter and more cheerful. The pictures on the walls had a different meaning. The very chairs looked new. Nothing appeared just as Marian left it. Even Aunt Amelia was better looking and spoke more kindly to the child. Nothing was ever the same after Marian had diphtheria. She never returned to the little back room where she was away from all the family at night, nor did she ever again doubt that Uncle George was her own uncle.

Many bright days crowded one upon another during the remaining weeks of winter. The neighbors invited Marian to their homes and took her driving with them. Dolly Russel's mother gave a house party for her, inviting little girls from the country for a week in town. That was the time Marian was so happy she almost believed herself a princess

in a fairy tale. When she was home again, the child added a line to her diary.

"February 29.—I had diphtheria this winter and it was a good thing. I got well and now I am having the best time that ever was written down in a diary. I have changed my mind about being an author. I won't have time to write books. There is too much fun in the world."

CHAPTER XIV

MUSICAL CONVERSATIONS

Once in a great while Marian and Ella had a chance to play together. These rare occasions were times of joy.

Mrs. St. Claire usually took Ella with her wherever she went, but sometimes she was compelled to leave the child at home with her father or Tilly, and there was merriment in the house. The little cousins had gay times and their only regret was that such hours of happiness were few. At last Marian thought of a plan. Her new room was opposite Ella's. As Aunt Amelia insisted upon sending Marian to bed at seven, Uncle George declared that early hours were necessary for Ella's welfare. Accordingly, both children went to their rooms at the same time with instructions not to talk. No one cautioned them not to sing and singing was one of Marian's habits. After listening to the solos a few nights, Ella tried

a song of her own and that gave Marian an idea. She listened until Ella stopped for breath and then expressed a few thoughts to the tune of "Home, Sweet Home."

"O-oh, I know what will be great fun
And I'll tell you what it is,
We will play go to gay old concerts,
And take our children too.

"First the other lady
Can sing a good long song,
And then it will be my turn next,
And I'll sing a song myself.

"Fun fu-un-fun, fun-fun,
I guess it will be fun-fun,
I guess it will be fun."

It was fun. The other lady took the hint quickly. She and her children went to the concert without waiting to get ready. Furthermore she left herself sitting beside her children in the best seat in the hall and at the same time took her place on the stage. She even went so far as to become a colored man while she sang

"Way down upon the Suwanee River."

Ella's mother came up-stairs for something as the gentleman was rendering this selection with deep feeling, but she had no idea that her little daughter was singing on the stage, nor did she know that the greatest soprano in America was the next performer, although she did hear Marian begin in tragic tones, "'There is a happy land, far, far away.'" "Far, far away" was tremulous with emotion.

From that hour dated many a concert, and after the concerts, the ladies continued to sing everything they had wished to talk over during the day. Often the musical conversations were cut short by an admonition from the hall below, but even Tilly never learned the nature of those evening songs. As the children disturbed nobody and were put to bed long before they were sleepy, Uncle George said, "Let them sing." In this way Marian and Ella became well acquainted.

One night Marian asked Ella if she knew anything about how she happened to be taken to the Little Pilgrim's Home when she was a baby.

"No-o-o," replied Ella in shrill soprano,
"They won't tell-ell me-e a thing now-ow days
But a long time ago-go
They used to talk about everything
Right before me-e, only the trouble is-s,
I was such a little goo-oose
I didn't think much about it."

"Do you know anything about my mother-other-other?"
Chanted the musician across the hall.

"No-o-o," was the response,
"I only know-o that my mother-other
Didn't know your mother-other, ever in her li-ife,
But I do-oo remember-ember that the folks at that Ho-o-me
Had some things that used to belong-long
To your mother-other.
And they are packed away-way somewhere in the house.
I guess they are in the attic-attic,
But of course I don't know-o.

"Once I saw-aw a picture of your mother-other
But I don't remember-ember
What she looked like, looked like-looked like.
Don't you wi-ish your mother wasn't dead?
If you had a mother-other
I could go to your hou-ouse
And your mother-other
Would let us play together-ether."

"Yes, yes, she would," Marian's voice chimed in,
She would let as play-ay
All the day-ay.
And sometimes I thi-ink my mother is ali-ive,
And if she is, won't I be gla-ad.
If I do find my mother-other
And I go to live with her-er,
Why, may be your mother-other will die-i
And then you can come and live with u-us
And won't that be gay-ay.
You never know what's going to happen in this world."

"What kind of a song are you singing?" called Aunt Amelia.

"Opera house music," replied Marian, who feared that concerts were over for the season when she heard the question.

"I thought," responded Aunt Amelia, "that a lunatic asylum was turned loose. Don't let me hear another sound to-night."

The musicians laughed softly, and there were no more solos that evening.

The following day Ella and Aunt Amelia went visiting and in the middle of the forenoon, when Tilly was busily working in the kitchen, Marian climbed the attic stairs with determination in her eye. An old portrait of

George Washington on the wall at the landing seemed to question her motives. "Don't worry, Mr. Washington," remarked the child, "I'm not going to tell a lie, but sir, I'm looking for my mother and I'm going to find her if she's here." Marian gazed steadily at the face in the old oaken frame, and meeting with no disapproval there, passed on, leaving the Father of her Country to guard the stairway.

There were numerous trunks, boxes, barrels and an old sea-chest in the attic. Marian hesitated a moment before deciding to try the yellow chest. Her knees shook as she lifted the cover. At first she was disappointed; there seemed to be nothing but blankets in the chest. Then a bit of blue silk peeping from beneath the blankets caught her eye and Marian knew she was searching in the right place. From the depths of the chest she drew forth a bundle, unfolded it and beheld a beautiful gown of pale blue silk, trimmed with exquisite lace. Tears filled her eyes as she touched the shimmering wonder. She had never seen anything like it.

"This was my mother's," she whispered, and

kissed the round neck as she held the waist close in her arms. "She wore it once, my mother." Marian would gladly have looked at the dress longer but time was precious and there was much to see. Embroidered gowns of purest white, bright sashes and ribbons were there, and many another dainty belonging of the woman whose name was never mentioned in the presence of her child. In a carved ivory box, were jewels. Marian closed it quickly, attracted by a bundle at the bottom of the chest. She had found it at last. The picture of her mother. It was in an oval frame, wrapped in a shawl of white wool.

"Oh, if I had her, if she could only come to me," cried Marian, as the lovely face became her own. Though the child might never again see the picture, yet would it be ever before her.

When she dared stay in the attic no longer, Marian kissed the picture, wrapped it in the white shawl and laid it tenderly away. As she did so she noticed for the first time a folded newspaper on the bottom of the chest. Inside the paper was a small photograph.

Marian tiptoed to the attic stairs and listened a moment before she looked at the photograph. Then she uttered a low exclamation of delight. There was no doubt that the face in the oval frame was her mother's, for the small picture was a photograph of Marian's father and a beautiful woman. "It's the same head," whispered the child, "and oh, how pretty she is. I am so glad she is my mother!

"I wonder what they saved an old newspaper so carefully for?" continued Marian. "Maybe I had better look at it. What does this mean? 'Claimed by Relatives,' who was claimed, I wonder? Oh! I was! Now I'll find out all I want to know because, only see how much it tells!"

Marian laid the photograph down and read the article from beginning to end. She didn't see George Washington when she passed him on the landing on the way down-stairs and for the rest of the day the child was so quiet every one in the house marveled. There were no concerts that evening. The leading soprano had too much on her mind. The following morning Marian sharpened her lead

pencil and opened her diary. After looking for a moment at the white page she closed the book.

"No use writing down what you are sure to remember," she remarked, "and besides that, it is all too sad and finished. I am going outdoors and have some fun." Marian was in the back yard watching a cricket, when Ella sauntered down the path singing, "Good-morning, Merry Sunshine."

"Where are you going, sweetheart?" called her mother from the kitchen window.

"Just down here by the fence to get some myrtle leaves," Ella replied and went on singing.

Marian bent over the cricket nor did she look up although Ella gave her surprising information as she passed.

"If I were you, Miss Marian Lee,
I'll tell you what I'd do,
I'd pack my doll and everything I wanted to take with me,
Because in the very early morning,
You're surely going away
To a country town where you will stay
Until school begins again.

"I knew they were going to send you somewhere,
But I didn't know just when,
Until I just now heard my father and mother
Both talking all about it.
I know you'll have a pretty good time,
I wish I were going too,
But maybe you'll find some girls to play with,
I'm sure I hope you do."

Marian smiled but dared not reply, especially as the singer broke down and laughed and Aunt Amelia knew there were no funny lines in "Good-morning, Merry Sunshine."

The hint was enough. Marian straightened her affairs for a journey and a long absence from home.

CHAPTER XV

LITTLE SISTER TO THE DANDELION

MARIAN asked no questions the following morning until she was on her way to the station with Uncle George. "Where am I going?" she finally ventured.

"Where you passed the summer last year," was the reply. "How does that suit you?"

"Suit me," repeated Marian, "nothing ever suited me better. I'm pretty glad I'm going there. Why didn't you send me back to school, Uncle George? School won't be out for two months. I'm glad you didn't, but why?"

"Well, sis, you told me you wanted to go to the country school."

"Yes, but ——"

"Now's your chance," interrupted the man, "learn all you can and try to do some one

thing better than any one else in school, will you?"

"Well, but Uncle George, big boys and big girls go to country schools."

"What of it, Marian? You do some one thing better than any one else in school, and when you come home this fall you may choose any book you wish at the book store, and I will buy it for you."

"But, Uncle George, how will you know whether I really do something better than any one else or not?"

"I'll take your word for it, Marian."

"My word is true," the child remarked with dignity.

"No doubt about it," added Uncle George, turning away to hide a smile.

Just as the train pulled into the station, Marian caught a glimpse of a small blue butter-fly. It fluttered away out of sight as Uncle George said "good-bye." "Oh, I hate to leave that butterfly," exclaimed Marian, and those were the last words Uncle George heard as he left her. The passengers smiled, but Uncle George looked thoughtful. There was

so much to be seen from the car windows and so many folks to wonder about within the car, the journey seemed short.

Two young ladies welcomed Marian at the train, hugging and kissing her the minute the small feet touched the platform. "I guess folks will think you're some relation to me," laughed the child.

"So we are," replied Miss Ruth Golding. "We are your cousins."

"Certainly," agreed Miss Kate, "your Uncle George knew us when we were little girls, so of course we are your cousins."

"Of course!" echoed Marian, "and I know my summer of happiness has begun this day in April."

"Your troubles have begun, you mean," warned Miss Ruth; "the school-teacher boards with us and you'll have to toe the mark."

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed Marian. "I can walk to school with her."

"You won't say 'goody' when you see the lady," predicted Miss Kate. "She's as sober as a judge, very quiet, and keeps to herself."

"What's the matter with her?" asked Marian.

"She's lived in the city all her life and eaten books," explained Ruth. "She eats them, Marian, covers, binding, pictures and everything. Too bad, but maybe you'll get used to it. Here is mother coming to meet you, and here comes Carlo."

Marian ran ahead to throw her arms around Mrs. Golding's neck. "I am so glad they sent me back to you," she cried. "I didn't say anything about it to my aunt because she would have sent me somewhere else. It doesn't do to let her know when you're too happy. She isn't a bit like you, not a bit."

"No, I think not," was the response. "You see, dear, your neighbor, Mrs. Russel, is one of my old friends, and she has told me so much about your aunt I feel as if I know her. I am sure we are not alike."

"Why, I should say not!" laughed Marian. "Why she's as thin as—as knitting needles, and you're as plump as new pin cushions. Won't we have fun this summer,

though? Well, Carlo, old fellow. Didn't forget Marian, did he? Nice old doggie."

"Down, sir!" Mrs. Golding commanded. "He is so glad to see you, Marian, he can't express his feelings without trying to knock you over."

"I wish Uncle George owned a dog," commented Marian; "there'd always be some one glad to see you when you got home. I like dogs. Does the teacher come home at noon, Mrs. Golding?"

"No, sometimes we don't see her until supper time. She won't be such jolly company for you as my girls. She's too quiet."

"Is she cross, Mrs. Golding?"

"No, oh, no indeed."

"Then I shall like her," was the quick reply.

There were callers in the late afternoon, so Marian wandered out alone. She had gone but a short distance down the lane when she saw dandelions ahead. She gathered a handful of the short-stemmed blooms and walked on. In the distance she heard a bluebird singing. Marian ran to find it and was re-

warded by a flash of glorious blue as the bird sought a tree across the river. Marian followed it as far as she could, being obliged to stop at the river's bank. As she stood gazing after the bird, she was startled by a woman's voice.

"What have you in your hand, little girl?"

Turning, Marian saw a young lady sitting on a log near by. "Just dandelions," the child replied, and would have hidden the bunch behind her if the young lady had not forbidden it.

"We all love dandelions, little girl," she said; "come and show them to me."

Marian wonderingly obeyed.

"Did you ever look at a dandelion through a microscope?" continued the young lady.

"No, I never did."

The stranger passed Marian a microscope and asked her to tell what she saw.

"Oh, I never knew a dandelion was like this," said Marian; "why there are a thousand little blossoms in it all crowded together, and they are the goldenest golden ever was! Oh, oh, oh! Wasn't it lucky you were here

so I could see through your microscope? What if I had never seen that dandelion!"

"Would you like to borrow the microscope often?" asked the young lady, smiling so pleasantly Marian straightway decided that she was pretty.

"Well, I should say yes, Miss—Miss—you see I don't know what your name is?"

"Oh, that's so, I am Miss Smith, Miss Virginia Smith. Who are you?"

"My name," was the reply, "is Marian Lee, but who I am I don't really know."

Miss Smith repressed her curiosity, believing that Marian was the little girl the Goldings were to meet that day.

"It's everything to have a name," said she.

"Yes, but I'd like some relatives," Marian explained, "some real sisters and cousins and aunts of my own."

"Why don't you do as Hiawatha did?" Miss Smith suggested.

"You mean play all the birds and squirrels are my brothers and sisters? I think I will. I'll be little sister to the dandelion."

Miss Smith laughed with Marian. "I'll do

the same thing," said she, "and if we are sisters to the dandelion, you must be my little sister and I'm your big sister and all the wild flowers belong to our family."

"It's a game," agreed Marian. "I suppose little Indian children picked dandelions in the spring-time before Columbus discovered America."

"There were no dandelions then to pick," Miss Smith remonstrated. "The plant was brought here by white men. Its name is from the French, meaning lion's tooth."

"I don't see anything about a dandelion to mean lion's tooth," objected Marian; "do you?"

"No, I don't, Marian, nor does any one know exactly how it came by its name. Some believe it was given to the plant because its root is so white; then again, in the old days lions were pictured with teeth yellow as dandelion blossoms. The explanation I like best is that the dandelion was named after the lion because the lion is the animal that used to represent the sun, and all flowers named after him are flowers of the sun."

"Do you know anything more about dandelions?" questioned Marian.

"If I don't," said Miss Virginia Smith, smiling as she spoke, "it isn't because there is nothing more to learn. Did you ever hear the dandelion called the shepherd's clock?"

"No, Miss Smith, never. Why should they call it that?"

"Because the dandelion is said to open at five and close at eight."

"Well!" exclaimed Marian, "I guess you could write a composition about dandelions."

"Possibly," was the laughing response. "As far as that goes, Marian, there isn't a thing that grows that hasn't a history if you take the time and trouble to hunt it up."

"Skunk cabbages?" suggested Marian.

"Yes, 'skunk cabbages,'" was the reply. "What flowers do you suppose are related to it?"

"I don't know, unless Jack-in-the-pulpit, maybe, is it?"

"That's right, guess again."

"I'll have to give up, Miss Smith. I never

saw anything except Jack-in-the-pulpit that looks a bit like old skunk cabbage."

"The calla lily, Marian, what do you think of that?"

"I don't know, Miss Smith, but such things happen, of course, because Winnie Raymond has a horrible looking old Uncle Pete, and Winnie's awful pretty herself. But how do you know so much about plants?"

"By reading and observation, Marian."

"Are there many books about wild flowers, Miss Smith?"

"More than we can ever read, little girl. Better than that the country around this village is a garden of wild flowers. Down by the old mill and on the hills, in the fields and woods and along the river bank, we shall find treasures from now on every time we take the shortest walk."

"Oh, dear," grumbled Marian, "isn't it too bad I've got to go to school?"

"Why don't you like to go to school, child?"

"At home I do, on account of recesses. I don't like the school part of it much, but

here it would be recess all the time if I could go in the woods with you, besides having a good time with the Golding girls and playing all day long where I don't get scolded. Dear! I wish I didn't have to go to school, or else I wish they'd have lessons about birds and flowers and butterflies and little animals, instead of old arithmetic. I hate arithmetic."

"Do you?" sympathized Miss Smith. "That's too bad, because we all need to understand arithmetic."

"I don't," protested Marian. "I don't even think arithmetic thoughts."

"Some day, Marian, you will wish you understood arithmetic," said Miss Smith. "Now if you and I went for a walk and we saw ten crows, three song sparrows, five bluebirds, seven chipping sparrows and twenty-seven robins, and Mrs. Golding asked us when we got home how many birds we saw, I wonder how you would feel if you couldn't add?"

"Well, but don't you see," interrupted Marian, "I could add birds, yes and subtract and multiply and divide them. That's dif-

ferent. What I don't like is just figures and silly arithmetic things."

"Well, Marian, I may as well tell you now that I'm the school-teacher and we'll have arithmetic stories about birds and flowers and little animals."

"Oh, are you the teacher?" exclaimed Marian. "I thought she was—was—different, you know."

"Different, how?"

"Well, they told me the teacher was—was quiet."

"So she is, usually," agreed Miss Smith, "but this afternoon she met one of her own folks. This little sister to the dandelion."

"Won't we have fun!" was Marian's comment.

CHAPTER XVI

PROFESSOR LEE, BOTANIST

Miss Virginia Smith knew how to teach arithmetic. Fractions lost their terror for Marian, even the mysteries of cube root were eagerly anticipated. History became more than ever a living story to the child, and geography was a never failing joy. On rainy days every stream and puddle between Mrs. Golding's home and the schoolhouse was named, and if several Mississippi Rivers emptied into Gulfs of Mexico, and if half a dozen Niles overflowed their banks over the country road, what difference did it make? When the sun shone bright and only dewdrops glistened in the shade, Marian saw deserts and plains, mountains and volcanoes along the dusty way.

For a time the game of geography became so absorbing Marian played it at the table, forming snowy peaks of mashed potatoes and

sprinkling salt upon the summits until the drifts were so deep, only the valleys below were fit to be eaten. Brown gravy was always the Missouri River winding its way across Marian's plate between banks of vegetables. Ice cream meant Mammoth Cave. A piece of pie was South Africa from which the Cape of Good Hope quickly disappeared. However hungry Marian might be, there was a time when she ate nothing but continents and islands.

Whatever Miss Virginia Smith tried to teach the country children, Marian Lee appropriated for herself. She listened to all recitations whether of the chart class or the big boys and girls. Perhaps if Marian had attended more strictly to her own lessons, she might have made the kind of a record she thought would please Uncle George. As it was, Jimmie Black "Left off head" in the spelling class more times than she did, the first month. Belle Newman had higher standings in arithmetic and geography, and some one carried off all the other honors.

Marian, however, knew something about

botany before the end of May, and she gloried in the fact that she could name all the bones in her body. Mr. Golding was proud of her accomplishment and once when she went with him to see old Bess newly shod, he asked her to name the bones for the blacksmith: and the blacksmith thought it wonderful that a little girl knew so much. "Yes, but that's nothing," remarked the child, "all the big boys and girls in the fifth reader class know their bones."

"Ain't you in the fifth reader?" asked the blacksmith.

"No," was the reply, "I can read the whole reader through, but I'm not in that reader class. That's the highest class in the country. I suppose being in the fifth reader here is like being in the high school at home just before you graduate. I won't have to learn bones when I get up to the high school."

"And still you say that ain't nothing," protested the blacksmith.

Marian shook her head. "I haven't done one thing in school better'n anybody else," she said, "and to do something better'n any-

body else is all that counts. Don't you try to be the best blacksmither in the country?"

Old Bess flourished her tail in the blacksmith's face and the man spoke to her next instead of to Marian. He wasn't the best blacksmith and he knew it. Some years afterwards when he had won an enviable reputation, he told Mr. Golding that the first time he thought of trying to do unusually good work was when the little Lee girl asked him if he tried to be the best blacksmith in the country.

Concerning botany, Miss Smith knew that Marian was interested in the wild flowers and had told her many a legend of wayside blooms when walking with her through the fields and across the hills: but she had no idea how much the child had learned from listening to the recitations of the botany class, until the Saturday morning when the wax doll went to school. Miss Smith happened to pass the corn-crib unnoticed by teacher or pupil.

The doll was propped in an attitude of attention among the ears of corn.

"Now, little girl," the instructor was saying, "if you ever expect to amount to anything in

this world, you've got to use your eyes and ears. I'm the Professor of Botany your mother was reading about last night, who knew nothing about botany until she began to study it. Next winter when we can't get outdoors, I am going to give you lessons on seeds and roots and things and stems and leaves. The Professor of Botany has got to learn the names of the shapes of leaves and how to spell them. She really ought to own a book but she doesn't, and that can't be helped. You're sure to get what you want some time though, if you only try hard enough, and the Botany Professor will get a book. You just wait.

"Don't think, little girl, because we are skipping straight over to flowers this morning that you are going to get out of learning beginnings. We're taking flowers because it is summer. Of course you know this is a strawberry blossom I hold in my hand. Well, if it wasn't for strawberry blossoms you couldn't have strawberry shortcake, remember that. That's the principal thing about strawberries. This little circle of white leaves is called the

corolla. Now don't get the calyx mixed with the corolla as some children do. I tell you it makes me feel squirmy to hear some big girls recite. You ought to see this flower under a microscope. I guess I'll go and ask Professor Smith for hers."

Marian turned around so quickly Professor Smith was unable to get out of sight. The doll's instructor felt pretty foolish for a moment, but only for a moment.

"Marian Lee," said Miss Smith, "you shall join the botany class next Monday morning and I'll give you a book of mine to study."

"What will the big girls say?" gasped Marian.

"About as much as your doll in there," laughed Miss Smith, adding seriously, "I won't expect too much of you, Marian, but you may as well be in the class and learn all you can."

On Monday morning, although the big girls smiled and the little girls stared, Professor Lee became a member of the botany class and learned to press the wild flowers.

"I won't have the most perfect lessons of

anybody in the class," Marian confided to her doll, "because the big girls know so much; but I'll try and have the best specimens in my herbarium. I can do that, I am sure. I have just got to do something better than any one else in school before I go home."

The following Saturday the doll listened with unchanging face to a confession. "Every one of the big girls can press specimens better than I can. Their violet plants look like pictures but mine look like hay. I guess Uncle George will be discouraged. I don't do anything best. A robin is building a nest just outside the window where my seat is in school and I forgot to study my spelling lesson. Of course I missed half the words. It was the robin's fault. She ought to keep away from school children."

CHAPTER XVII

THE COMPOSITION ON WILD FLOWERS

All the children in Marian's class were writing in their copy-books "Knowledge is Power." The pens squeaked and scratched and labored across pages lighted by June sunshine. The little girls' fingers were sticky and boy hands were cramped. It was monotonous work. The "K" was hard to make and the capital "P" was all flourishes.

Marian sighed, then raised her hand.

"What is it?" asked Miss Smith.

"Will you tell which one of us has the best looking page when we get through with 'Knowledge is Power'?"

Miss Smith consented and Marian, determined to conquer, grasped her pen firmly and bent to the task. Two days later the page was finished and seven copy-books were piled upon Miss Smith's desk for inspection. At first Miss Smith smiled as she examined the

various assertions that "Knowledge is Power," then she grew serious.

"Did you try your best, children?" she asked, whereupon five girls and two boys looked surprised and hurt.

"Well, then, I wonder what is the trouble?" continued Miss Smith. "I am ashamed of your work, children, it seems as if you could do better."

"Which is best?" demanded Marian. It made no difference how poor her copy was if only it was better than the others. The child was sorry she had asked the question when she knew the truth. "I think it is pretty discouraging," she said, "when you try your best and do the worst."

"We will begin something new," Miss Smith suggested. "Next week we will write compositions on wild flowers and to the one who does the neatest looking work, I will give the little copy of 'Evangeline' I have been reading to you. It will make no difference whether the compositions are long or short, but the penmanship must be good. Every one of you knows the spring flowers for we

have had them here in school and have talked about them every day."

"Will we have to write in our copy-books just the same?" asked Tommy Perkins.

"No," was the reply; "you may work on your compositions all the time we usually write in the copy-books, and remember, it doesn't make a bit of difference how short your compositions are."

That was exactly what Marian did not remember. At first she wrote:

"No flower is so pretty as the anemone that blooms on the windy hill."

At recess she consulted Miss Smith. "Is that long enough?" she asked.

"Yes, that will do," was the reply.

"Is it fair if I copy off her composition?" asked Tommy Perkins, "and practice writing it? I can't make up one."

"That sentence will do as well as any other," agreed Miss Smith. "I simply wish you to write something you choose to do."

Marian beamed upon Tommy. "I'll copy it for you," she said. "I don't really think anemones are the prettiest flowers, Tommy,

but they are easy to write; no ups or downs in the word if the flowers themselves do dance like fairies all the day long."

"I wish't you'd write me a composition," put in Frankie Bean.

"I will," assented Marian, "after school calls, but now, come on out and play."

After recess, Marian passed Frankie a piece of paper upon which was written this:

"Clover loves a sunny home."

"That's easy, Frankie, because 'y' is the only letter below the line. You can say sun-kissed if you would rather keep it all above the line. If I don't get the book, may be you will. I hope you won't be disappointed, though. I would try if I were you. Something may happen to me before next week, you never can tell."

Monday and Tuesday Marian wrote compositions for the four girls to copy. They were more particular than the boys had been and their compositions were longer.

By the time Marian was ready to settle down to her sentence on the anemone, she was tired of it and determined to write something

new. Soon she forgot all about penmanship and Friday afternoon found her with a long composition to copy in an hour. Even then, after the first moment of dismay, she forgot that neatness of work alone, would count.

Miss Virginia Smith read the composition aloud.

"*Wild Flowers, by Marian Lee.*

"When you shut your eyes and think of wild flowers, you always want to open them and fly to the hills and the woods. You wish you had wings like the birds.

"In an old flower legend book that tells about things most folks don't know, I found out what you were always sure of before you knew it. The anemones are fairy blossoms. The pink on the petals was painted by the fairies and on rainy nights elves hide in the dainty blooms.

"Tulips are not wild, but how can I leave them out when the fairies used them for cradles to rock their babies in.

"Some folks laugh at you when you hunt for four-leaved clover, but you can never see

the fairies without one nor go to the fairy kingdom.

"The old book says, too, that the bluebells ring at midnight to call the fairies together. I believe it because I have seen bluebells and have almost heard the music. I don't believe they ever were witches' thimbles.

"You most always get your feet wet when you go after marsh marigolds, but it can't be helped. They are yellow flowers and live where they can hear the frogs all the time. I wonder if they ever get tired of frog concerts. I never do, only I think it is mournful music after the sun goes down. It makes you glad you are safe in the house.

"There is one lovely thing about another yellow flower. It is the cinquefoil and you find it before the violets come if you know where to look. On rainy days and in damp weather, the green leaves bend over and cover the little yellow blossom. The cinquefoil plant must be afraid its little darling will catch cold.

"If you ever feel cross, the best thing you can do is to go out where the wild flowers

grow. You will be sure to hear birds sing and you may see a rabbit or a squirrel. Anyway, you will think thoughts that are not cross."

"Evangeline" was given to Tommy Perkins. He had practiced writing the anemone sentence until his perfectly written words astonished Miss Virginia Smith.

"I know my writing isn't good," admitted a little girl named Marian. "Only see how it goes up-hill and down-hill and how funny the letters are."

CHAPTER XVIII

MARIAN'S LETTER HOME

MARIAN'S letters to her Uncle George were written on Sunday afternoons. She wrote pages and pages about Miss Smith and the country school and begged him not to come for her in August.

"I haven't done anything better than any one else in school yet," she wrote, "but I am learning all kinds of things and having the best time ever was. I want to go to the country school until I graduate. I'll be ready for college before you know it if you will only let me stay.

"I am good all the time because Mrs. Golding says so and Miss Ruth and Miss Kate take me almost everywhere they go—when they drive to town, circuses and things and I have lovely times every day.

"I would tell you who I play with only you would forget the names of so many chil-

dren. When I can't find any one else I go to the mill to see the miller's boy. That isn't much fun because the miller's boy is half foolish. His clothes are always covered with flour and he looks like a little old miller himself. He jumps out at you when you don't know where he is and says 'Boo!' and scares you almost out of your wits, and that makes his father laugh. I tried to teach him to read but I didn't have good luck. He read 'I see the cat' out of almanacs and everything.

"The old miser died last night, Uncle George, and I saw him in the afternoon. Only think of it, I saw a man that died. After dinner I went to see the miller's boy and he wasn't there. His father said he was wandering along the river bank somewhere, so I stayed and talked to the miller. Pretty soon the boy came back making crazy motions with his arms and telling his father the old miser wanted to see him quick.

"I went outside and watched the big wheel of the mill when the boy and his father went away, but it wasn't any time before the boy

came back and said the old miser wanted to see me. Of course I went as fast as I could go, and when I got to the hut, the miller asked me if I could say any Bible verses, and if I could to say them quick because the old miser wanted somebody to read the Bible quick—quick. I thought it was queer, Uncle George, but I was glad I had learned so much out of the Bible.

"The old miser was all in rags and I guess he didn't feel well then, because he was lying down on a queer old couch and he didn't stir, but I tell you he watched me. I didn't want to go in the hut, so I stood in the doorway where I could feel the sunshine all around me. Some way I thought that wasn't any time to ask questions, so I began the Twenty-third Psalm right straight off. When I got to the end of that I was going to say the first fourteen verses of John, but the old miser raised one hand and said, 'Again—again,' but before I got any further than 'The valley of the shadow,' he went to sleep looking at me and I never saw his face so happy. It smoothed all out and looked different. Poor

old miser, the boys used to plague him. The miller motioned to his boy and me to go away. I guess he was afraid Jakey would wake the old miser. Of course I knew enough to keep still when a tired looking old man dropped to sleep.

"I don't know just when the old miser died, Uncle George, nobody talks about it where I can hear a word. Mrs. Golding says when I grow up I will be glad that I could repeat the Twenty-third Psalm to a poor old man who hadn't any friends. She says it isn't true that he was a miser, he was just an unfortunate old man. I wonder if he was anybody's grandfather? You never can tell.

"I am well acquainted with all the folks in the village, Uncle George, and lots of times I go calling. There are some old folks here who never step outside of their houses and they are glad to have callers. One old blind woman knits all the time. She likes to be read to, real well. And there is one woman, the shoemaker's wife, that has six children that bother her so when she tries to work; she says it does her good to see me coming.

"Only think, Uncle George, how lonesome I will be when I get home where I am not acquainted. The only sad thing that has happened here all summer is that the miser died, and of course you know that might be worse.

"I would like to be with Miss Smith more than I am but she studies almost all the time. I don't see what for because she knows everything, even about the stars. She likes me a great deal but I guess nobody knows it. You mustn't have favorites when you are a schoolteacher, she told me so.

"You don't know how hard it is, Uncle George, to do something better than anybody else. You might think it would be easy, but somebody always gets ahead of you in everything, you can't even keep your desk the cleanest. Some girls never bring in anything from the woods, so of course they can keep dusted.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed in

"Your loving niece,

"MARIAN LEE."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MOST TRUTHFUL CHILD IN SCHOOL

In the early morning the schoolhouse was a quiet place, and there Miss Virginia Smith went to study. No one knew why she worked so hard, though Marian often wondered. It was her delight to please Miss Smith, and when the teacher waited several mornings until a certain mail train passed and the letters were distributed, Marian offered to stop at the post-office and get the mail.

"Are you sure you won't lose anything?" asked Miss Smith.

"Sure," promised Marian. "You go to school early as you used to do and I'll bring your letters when I come."

Usually the postmaster gave Marian something to carry to Miss Smith, and all went well until a few days before school closed. Elizabeth Gray called for Marian that morn-

ing and together they went to the post-office where they waited on tiptoe for the post-master to distribute the mail. There was one letter for Miss Smith, a thin, insignificant looking letter.

"That's nothing but an old advertisement," declared Elizabeth; "it wasn't worth waiting for."

"I guess you're right," agreed Marian, "see what it says in the corner. What's a seminary, anyway? Do you know?—'Young Ladies' Seminary.' Some kind of a new fashioned place to buy hats, may be, come on."

"Yes, let's get started before the Prior kids and the Perkinses catch up with us. I can't bear that Tommy Perkins."

"We could play De Soto if we had a crowd," suggested Marian. "You and I could be the head leaders and the Priors and the Perkins could be common soldiers."

"How do you play De Soto?" asked Elizabeth. "I never heard of it."

"You've heard of De Soto, the man that discovered the Mississippi River, I hope."

"Of course, he's in the history."

"Well, Elizabeth, I've been reading about him in one of Mr. Golding's books about early explorations and I knew in a minute that it would be fun to play De Soto on our way to school. Now, I'm De Soto."

"No, I'm going to be De Soto," insisted Elizabeth.

"You don't know how, Elizabeth Jane Gray, and you didn't think of it first. All right, though, you be De Soto if you want to. What are you going to do? Begin."

"You always want to be the head one in everything, Marian Lee. You needn't think I'm Tommy Perkins!"

"I don't, Elizabeth, I think you're that brave Spaniard Moscoso who was leader of the soldiers after De Soto died and was buried in the Mississippi River where the Indians couldn't find him. But if you want to be De Soto, go on, only I don't believe you know a thing about him except what the history says. Well, you're De Soto."

"You'll have to tell me what to do, Marian."

"I guess not, Miss Elizabeth, if you're De Soto you ought to know."

Elizabeth walked on in silence for a few moments until seized by an inspiration. "I'll be De Soto to-morrow morning," she remarked; "it's your turn first, of course, because you thought of the game. I'm—who did you say I am, Marian?"

"You're Moscoso, one of my officers, Elizabeth. Well, I'm De Soto and I have had wonderful adventures in my life. I was with Pizarro in the conquest of Peru and I went back to Spain rich, rich, rich. Now I am the Governor of Cuba and Florida and not long ago I had orders from Spain to explore Florida. Of course, Moscoso, you remember all about it, how we left Cuba with nine ships and landed at Tampa?"

"I remember it, Soty, just as well as if it was yesterday," and Moscoso, laughing merrily, swung his dinner pail in a perfect circle.

"Don't laugh, Moscoso, at serious things," continued De Soto; "and I think you really should call me Governor and I'll call you General. Well, General, we sent most of our

ships back to Cuba, and now we're searching for gold in Florida, not in our little State of Florida, but the big, wide, long Florida that used to be. Now, Elizabeth, we'll play wander around for three years, living in Indian villages winters and camping out summers and having fights and discovering new birds to write to Spain about and having all kinds of adventures, until we get to that big ditch at the four corners and that will have to be the Mississippi River, and we'll cross it. We can tie our handkerchiefs to sticks for banners.

"Let's play all the trees are Indians and all the little low bushes are wild beasts. The fences will do for mountains and I guess we'll think of other things to play as we go along. We'll have trouble with our soldiers, of course, they always do when they are hunting for gold. All these fields and woods, no, not woods, forests, I mean, are what you call the interior. Dandelions and buttercups will be gold that we steal from the Indians. We'll be awfully disappointed because this isn't a gold country like Peru, but we will take all there is, and I think we had better talk some

about going home to Spain. Of course I don't know I'm going to die of fever beyond the Mississippi and you don't know you'll have to go back to the coast without me. I wish we could talk a little bit of real Spanish, don't you, Elizabeth?"

"Hush," warned the General from Spain. "I hear Indians. Let's play the wind in the trees is Indian talk, Marian."

"Sure enough, Elizabeth, we must advance cautiously, General Moscoso, they always 'advance cautiously' in the books, or else 'beat a hasty retreat.' We won't dare play retreat or we'll never get to school. Oh, they're friendly Indians, General, how fortunate."

De Soto had crossed the Mississippi when he grew pale as death and suddenly deserted his followers. The banners of Spain trailed in the dust. "Elizabeth Jane Gray, where's that letter?"

Two little girls gazed at each other in dismay.

"Have you lost it?" gasped Elizabeth.

"If I haven't, where is it?" asked Marian.

"Can't you remember anything about it?"

Elizabeth went on, "when you had it last, or anything?"

"No, I can't. Let's go straight back over the road and hunt. I must have dropped it and perhaps we may find it if we look. I can't believe it is really lost. Oh, Elizabeth, what shall I do if it is? I adore Miss Smith and what will she think?"

"She won't think anything if you keep still, Marian; the letter was only an old advertisement, anyway."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear!" wailed Marian. "This is dreadful. I don't see a thing that looks like a letter anywhere. I am going to climb a tree and look way off over the fields." Although the children searched faithfully, they could not find the letter.

"We'll hunt at noon," suggested Elizabeth, deeply touched by Marian's distress, "and if I were you I wouldn't say a word about it."

"But Elizabeth, what if she asks me if there was a letter?"

"Fib," was the response.

"It's enough to make anybody, Elizabeth."

"You'll be a goose, Marian, if you own up.

I won't tell on you and the letter didn't amount to anything, anyway. Let's run for all we're worth and get there before school calls if we can. Sure's we're late she'll ask questions."

Just as the bell was ringing, two breathless little girls joined their schoolmates. Their faces were flushed and their hair was tumbled. Miss Smith smiled when she saw them, but asked no questions. Noticing Marian's empty hands, she said evidently to herself, " No letter yet ! "

" You're going to get out of this as easy's pie, just keep your mouth shut," whispered Elizabeth.

" I shall have to tell," groaned Marian.

" Don't be silly," Elizabeth advised.

During the morning exercises Marian determined to confess no matter what happened. When the chart class was called to the recitation seat she raised her hand and was given permission to speak to Miss Smith. Marian didn't glance towards Elizabeth Gray as she walked to the desk. Elizabeth had never stolen cookies. " Miss Smith," said Marian,

"you had a letter this morning and I lost it."

"You dear child, I am so glad you told me," and Miss Smith who had so often insisted that a school-teacher must never have favorites, put her arms around the little girl and kissed the soft, brown hair. "Now tell me what was printed on the envelope if you can remember."

Word for word Marian described the letter.

"It is the one I was expecting," said Miss Smith, and while the chart class waited, their teacher wrote a letter, stamped it and sent it to the post-office by Tommy Perkins.

Two days later, Marian carried Miss Smith a letter exactly like the one she had lost. Miss Smith read it, smiled and asked Marian to stay after school.

"You're going to get your scolding at last," predicted Elizabeth. "I told you not to tell."

At four o'clock the children trooped out and flew down the road like wild birds escaped from a cage, leaving Marian uneasily twisting her handkerchief while she waited for Miss

Smith to speak. Nothing was said until the sound of childish voices came from a distance. Then Miss Smith looked up and laughed. "Can you keep a secret for a few days, Marian?" she asked. "Come here, dear, and read the letter you brought me this morning."

Marian read the short letter three times before she asked, "Are you going?"

"Going," echoed Miss Smith; "that is the position I have long wished for, Marian. Only think how I shall enjoy teaching botany and English in a boarding-school. You see what they say, Marian, they want an immediate reply or it will be too late. If you hadn't told me about the letter you received the other day, I should have lost the position. I imagined what the letter was and sent for a copy. If you hadn't told me the truth, Marian, only think what a difference it would have made!"

"I just have to tell the truth," said the little girl.

"I believe you, dear, I never saw a more truthful child in my life."

"Would you dare say I am the most honest

child in school?" asked Marian, a sudden light making her face beautiful. "Will you write it down and sign your name?"

"Well, you are the queerest mortal," exclaimed Miss Smith, but reaching for a piece of paper and a pen, she wrote this:

"Marian Lee is the most truthful pupil in my school.

"VIRGINIA SMITH, Teacher."

"It's for Uncle George," Marian explained. "He told me to try to do something better than anybody else and I haven't done it. He's coming for me Saturday and please do ask him to send me to your boarding-school. He has often talked about sending me away to school, but I used to be afraid to go and made a dreadful fuss, and then I had diphtheria."

Uncle George arrived on Friday in time to have a long talk with Miss Smith before she left on the evening train. Had Marian known the nature of their conversation, she might not have cried so bitterly when the hour of parting came.

CHAPTER XX

MORE CHANGES

MARIAN had been home a month when Uncle George decided to send her to boarding-school.

"It is a curious thing," he remarked to the child, "that other people find it so easy to get along with you, and here at home there is no peace in the house while you are in it."

The man's tones were savage and Marian cried. Tears always angered Uncle George, and when Uncle George was angry with Marian, Aunt Amelia generally sighed and straightway did her duty: and Aunt Amelia's duty towards Marian consisted in giving a detailed account of the child's faults and a history of her sins. She never failed to mention cookies. When Marian was wise, she kept still. If she ventured a remonstrance serious trouble was sure to follow. Out in the fresh air and sunshine, the child managed to be

happy in spite of everything: but within the four walls of Aunt Amelia's home it took courage to face life. She didn't know that her uncle had written to Miss Virginia Smith.

"They're going to do something with you, I don't know what," confided Ella. "I'll let you know as soon's I find out." Ella was as good as her word. "They're going to send you to boarding-school," was her next secret announcement, "but when or where, I don't know."

One morning Marian went to her room after breakfast and sat long by the open window, wondering what would become of her and why she had been taken from the Little Pilgrim's Home by an aunt who didn't want her. Tears splashed upon the window sill. Marian wiped her eyes quickly. Young as she was, the child realized how dangerous it is to be sorry for oneself. Without a backward glance, Marian walked from the room and closed the door she was never to open again. When she came home from school that night, the child played in the orchard until supper-time. Then she wondered why Aunt Amelia

didn't send her to her room. An hour passed before the woman looked at the clock and spoke. Instead of the words Marian expected to hear, Aunt Amelia said calmly:

"Your trunk is packed and the carriage is waiting to take you to the station. Get your coat and hat."

"Where am I going and who is going with me?" demanded the child, beginning to tremble so she could scarcely stand.

"I shall accompany you," replied Aunt Amelia, "and it makes no difference where you are going. You will know soon enough."

Marian shot a grateful look towards Ella, who was sobbing in a corner. But for the little cousin's assurance, Marian would have believed she was about to start for the long dreaded reform school. Nevertheless it was a shocking thing to be suddenly torn from every familiar sight and to be going so blindly into the unknown. Marian looked appealingly at Aunt Amelia and Uncle George before she broke down and cried. Aunt Amelia's face was stony, Uncle George looked cross and an-

noyed. Marian's grief became wild and despairing.

"I wish I could have my mother's picture to take with me," she sobbed, "I wish I could."

"That's a reasonable request and you shall have it," said Uncle George.

"It will be time enough when she is older," Aunt Amelia put in, while Marian held her breath. Would she get the picture or not? A word might ruin her chances, so she kept still, trying hard to smother her sobs.

"Are you going for the picture or shall I?" demanded Uncle George. Aunt Amelia went.

Marian was disappointed when she saw the small photograph of her father and mother. She wished for the face in the oval frame. She would have been more disappointed had she never seen the photograph, because instead of giving it to the child or allowing her to look at the picture, Aunt Amelia wrapped it in a piece of paper and put it in her own satchel.

Outside in the cool, silent night, Marian stopped crying. There was comfort in the

steadily shining stars. During the first long hours on the sleeping car, Marian tossed, tumbled and wondered where she was going. Asleep she dreamed of reform school: awake she feared dreams might come true. When trains rushed by in the darkness the child was frightened and shivered at the thought of wrecks. At last she raised her curtain and watched the stars. Repeating over and over one verse of the poem she had recited the last day of school in the country, she fell peacefully asleep. There were no more troubled dreams nor startled awakenings. When Marian opened her eyes in the morning, the verse still haunted her memory.

"I know not where His islands
Lift their fronded palms in air,
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care."

CHAPTER XXI

MARIAN REMEMBERS HER DIARY

"October 15.—You might as well keep a diary, especially in a school where they have a silent hour. It is the queerest thing I ever heard of but every night between seven and eight it is so still in this building you don't dare sneeze. It isn't so bad when you have a roommate because then you have to divide the hour with her. You stay alone half and then you go to the reading-room or the library and read something and try not to whisper to any of the girls, while your roommate stays alone her half of the hour.

"Perhaps the reason I don't like silent hour is because I used to have so many of them at home and now because I haven't any roommate I have to stay alone the whole hour. I don't know what to do with myself and that is why I am going to keep a diary again.

"There is a good reason why I haven't any roommate. When my aunt brought me here

the principal said they were expecting a little girl just my age and they were going to put her in this room with me. It isn't much fun to be a new girl in this kind of a school, especially when most everybody is older than you are. When the girls saw my aunt they stared, and they stared at me, too. It wasn't very nice and I felt uncomfortable. As long as my aunt stayed I didn't get acquainted. I didn't even dare say much to Miss Smith. I just moped around and wished I was out in the country with the happy Goldings. They said here, 'Poor little thing, she's homesick,' but I am sure I wasn't if that means I wanted to go back home. My aunt stayed two days and one night. She said she was waiting to see my roommate but at last she gave up and went home and then I felt different. I began to wonder what kind of a girl my roommate would be and when she came I was so happy I could scarcely breathe because she was Dolly Russel. We thought we were going to have such a good time, and we did for a few days until I was a big goose. I wrote home and told my aunt who my roommate was and that

ended it. Aunt Amelia wrote to the principal and she wrote to me, and then Dolly went to room with an old girl eighteen years old, from Kansas.

'Dolly says her new roommate is nice, but she's too old and besides that she's engaged. Dolly told me all about it.

"My aunt wouldn't let me room with Dolly because she said we would play all the time instead of studying our lessons. I guess she was afraid we would have a little fun. She told me in a letter that if she had known Dolly Russel was coming to this school she would have sent me somewhere else or kept me at home, no matter what Uncle George and Miss Smith said. I know why. Dolly has told the Kansas girl and some others about my aunt already, how cross she is and such things. I don't mind now what anybody says about Aunt Amelia since I have found out that she isn't any relation to me. She is just my aunt by marriage and you can't expect aunts by marriage to love you, and if your aunt doesn't love you, what's the use of loving your aunt.

"If I hadn't passed the entrance examinations here I couldn't have stayed. Dolly and a girl whose name is Janey somebody and I are the only little girls here. Janey is tall and wears her hair in a long, black braid. Mine's Dutch cut. Dolly Russel's is Dutch cut too. Janey calls us little kids and she tags around after the big girls. We don't care.

"October 16.—There's another girl coming from way out west. Her folks are going to be in Chicago this winter and they want her in this school. The Kansas girl told Dolly and me.

"October 17.—The new girl has come and they have put her with me. She's homesick. Her father brought her and then went right away. I didn't see him. I think I shall like the new girl. Her name is Florence Weston and she has more clothes than the Queen of Sheba. Miss Smith helped her unpack and I felt as if I would sink through to China when the new girl looked in our closet. It is a big closet and the hooks were nearly all empty because I haven't anything

much to hang up. I'll never forget how I felt when the new girl said to me, 'Where are your dresses?' Before I could think of anything to say, Miss Smith sent me for the tack hammer and I didn't have to answer.

"My room looked pretty lonesome after Dolly moved out, but now it is the nicest room in school because Florence Weston has so many beautiful things. She says this is horrid and I just ought to see her room at home. She can't talk about her home without crying. I know I'd cry if I had to go back to mine.

"October 20.—That Janey is a queer girl. She won't look at me and I really think it is because I haven't any pretty dresses. She is in our room half the time, too, visiting with Florence. They are great chums and they lock arms and tell secrets and laugh and talk about what they are going to do next summer and where they are going Christmas and everything. I wish more than ever that I had Dolly for my roommate. I wouldn't be surprised if her father is richer'n Florence Weston's father.

"That Janey puts on airs. Her last name is Hopkins. She signs her name 'Janey C. Hopkins.' She never leaves out the 'C,' I wonder why.

"October 21.—I like Florence Weston. She is not a bit like that proud Janey.

"November 1.—Sometimes I wish I had never come here to school. Once in a while I feel more lonesome, almost—than I ever did at home. It is on account of that Janey C. Hopkins. She wants to room with Florence and she tried to get me to say I would move in with Laura Jones, the girl she rooms with. Janey says she's going to the principal. Let her go. Miss Smith told me not to worry, they won't let chums like Florence and Janey room together because they won't study.

"November 2.—What did I tell you? I knew she'd be sorry. They won't let Janey room with Florence. Florence says she's glad of it. I suppose it is on account of hooks. Janey couldn't let her have more than half the hooks in the closet.

"November 3.—It wasn't on account of

hooks. Florence told me one of Janey's secrets and I know now what the 'C' means in Janey's name and I know who Janey C. Hopkins is, and I should think she would remember me, but she doesn't. Janey told Florence that she is adopted and that her new mother took her from the Little Pilgrims' home before they moved out to Minnesota. I was so surprised I almost told Florence I came from that same home, but I am glad I didn't.

"The only reason Florence doesn't want to room with Janey is because she lived in an orphan's home. She says you never can tell about adopted children and that maybe Janey's folks weren't nice, and anyway, that if she ever lived in an orphan's home she would keep still about it.

"I think I shall keep still, but I could tell Miss Florence Weston one thing, my folks were nice if they did die. I could tell her what I read in that newspaper in the sea-chest, how my father just would go to South America with some men to make his fortune and how after a while my mother thought he

was dead and then she died suddenly and all about how I happened to be taken to the Little Pilgrims' Home in the strange city where my mother and I didn't know anybody and nobody knew us.

"I could tell Florence Weston I guess that my father left my mother plenty of money and she wasn't poor, and after she died the folks she boarded with stole it all and pretty near everything she had and then packed up and went away and left me crying in the flat, and it just happened that some folks on the next floor knew what my name was and a few little things my mother told them.

"I won't speak of the Little Pilgrims' Home, though, because I can't forget how Uncle George acted about it. It was a pleasant, happy home just the same, and when I grow up and can do what I want to I am going back and hunt for Mrs. Moore and I won't stop until I find her. I have missed her all my life. You can't help wondering why some mothers live and some mothers die, and why some children grow up in their own homes

and other children don't have anybody to love them.

"November 4.—Sunday. The queer things don't all happen in books. I am glad I have a diary to put things in that I don't want to tell Miss Smith nor Dolly. Just before dark I was in the back parlor with a lot of girls singing. When we were tired of singing we told stories about our first troubles. I kept still for once, I really couldn't think what my first one was anyway. Two or three girls said that when their mothers died, that was their first sorrow, but Florence Weston said that her first one was funny. She couldn't remember when her own father died so she can't count that. The father she has now is a step one.

"Florence says she was a little bit of a girl when her mother took her one day to visit an orphan's home and she cried because she couldn't stay and have dinner with the little orphans. She says she remembers that one of the little girls wanted to go home with her and her mother and when she cried that little orphan girl cried too. They all laughed when

Florence told her story, all but me. I knew then what my first sorrow was. What would Florence think if she knew I was that little orphan? I must never tell her though or she wouldn't room with me. I should think Florence would be the happiest girl in the world. I should be if I had her mother. I can see her now if I shut my eyes. Her hair was shining gold and her eyes were like the sky when the orchard is full of apple blossoms.

"November 25.—Florence has gone to Chicago to stay until Monday morning because to-morrow is Thanksgiving day and her folks wanted to see her. Florence has two baby brothers and one little sister.

"Dolly Russel's father and mother have come here to be with Dolly to-morrow and they have invited me to have dinner with them down town. I wonder what Aunt Amelia would say if she knew I am going to be with the Russels all day to-morrow. Miss Smith got permission for me to go, she knew what to say to the principal, and she kissed me too, right before Mrs. Russel. I am

already beginning to dread going home next June.

"Janey C. Hopkins is going home this afternoon and the Kansas girl is going with her. There will be ten girls all alone in the big dining-room here to-morrow. I guess they will feel queer. I know one thing, I would rather stay here with nobody but the matron Christmas, than to go home, and I am glad Aunt Amelia says it would be foolish for any one to take such a long journey so I could be home for the holidays.

"Mrs. Russel is going to dress me all up to-morrow in one of Dolly's prettiest dresses. I do have some streaks of luck."

CHAPTER XXII

FLORENCE WESTON'S MOTHER

MARIAN was studying Monday morning when Florence returned from Chicago. She burst into the room like a wind blown rose, even forgetting to close the door until she had hugged Marian and hugged her again.

"Now shut your eyes tight," she commanded, "and don't you open them until I tell you to. You remember when you asked me if I had a picture of my mother and I said I hadn't anything only common photographs? well, you just wait."

Marian closed her eyes while Florence dived into her satchel for a small package.

"I have something in a little red leather case that will make you stare, Marian dear, you just wait."

"Well, I am waiting," was the retort, "with my eyes shut so tight I can see purple and crimson spots by the million. Hurry up,

why don't you? Is it a watch with your mother's picture in it?"

"No, guess again."

"A locket?"

"Dear me, no. It is something—three somethings that cost forty times as much as a watch or locket. Now open your eyes and look on the bureau."

"Why don't you say something?" questioned Florence, as Marian stood speechless before three miniatures in gold frames. "That's my mother and our baby in the middle frame, and the girl on this side is my little sister and the boy in the other frame we call brother, just brother, since the baby came. Why Marian Lee! I never thought of it before, but you look like brother just as sure as the world!

"Why, Marian! what's the matter, what makes you cry when you look at mamma's picture?"

"Nothing, Florence, only I want a mother myself, I always wanted one."

"You poor young one!" exclaimed Flor-

ence, "it must be dreadful not to have a mother."

"It's like the Desert of Sahara!" Marian declared, dashing the tears from her eyes and making an attempt to smile. "You will see your mother again soon."

"I know it, Marian, only think, three weeks more and then the holidays. Are you going home Wednesday night or Thursday morning?"

"I am not going home until June," was the reply.

"Can you stand it as long as that, Marian?"

The mere thought of feeling badly about not being home for the holidays made the child laugh.

"You are the queerest girl," exclaimed Florence, "you cry when I don't see anything to cry about and you laugh when I should think you would cry."

Marian checked an impulse to explain. How could Florence understand? Florence, whose beautiful mother smiled from the

round, gold frame, the girl whose sister and brothers waited to welcome her home.

"If they were mine," said Marian, gazing wistfully at the miniatures, "I would never leave them. I would rather be a dunce than go away to school."

"Then my father wouldn't own you," said Florence, laughing. "Mamma says she's afraid he wouldn't have any patience if I disgraced him in school. You ought to belong to him, Marian, he would be proud of you. You know your lessons almost without studying and you have higher standings than the big girls. You've been highest in all your classes so far, haven't you?"

"Yes," was the reply, "except in geometry, but what of it? Nobody cares."

"Don't your folks at home? Aren't they proud of you?"

"I used to hope they would be, Florence; but I tell you, nobody cares."

"Well, haven't you any grandfathers or grandmothers or other aunts or uncles?"

"I am not acquainted with them," said

Marian. "My uncle hasn't any folks, only distant cousins."

"That's just like my father," Florence interrupted. "His folks are all dead, though I have heard him mention one half brother with whom he wasn't friends. Mamma won't let me ask any questions about him. But, Marian, where are your mother's folks?"

Where were they, indeed? Marian had never thought of them. "Well, you see," the child hastily suggested, "they don't live near us."

The next time Florence saw Dolly Russel, she asked some questions that were gladly answered. "Go home!" exclaimed Dolly, "I shouldn't think she would want to go home! You see the St. Claires live right across the street from us and I have seen things with my own eyes that would astonish you. Besides that, a girl that used to work for the St. Claires, her name is Lala, works for us now, and if she didn't tell things that would make your eyes pop out of your head! Shall I tell you how they used to treat that poor little Marian? She's the dearest young

one, too—Lala says so—only mamma has always told me that it's wretched taste to listen to folks like Lala."

"Yes, do tell me," insisted Florence, and by the time Dolly Russel had told all she knew, Florence Weston was in a high state of indignation.

"Oh, her uncle and her little cousin are all right," remonstrated Dolly; "they are not like the aunt."

"I know what I shall do," cried Florence. "Oh, I know! I shall tell mamma all about Marian and ask if I may invite her to Chicago for the holidays. She would have one good time, I tell you. I like Marian anyway, she is just as sweet as she can be. I should be miserable if I were in her place, but she sings all the day long. My little sister would love her and so would brother and the baby. I am going straight to my room and write the letter this minute."

"Mrs. St. Claire won't let Marian go," warned Dolly; "you just wait and see. She doesn't want Marian to have one speck of fun."

Nevertheless Florence Weston wrote the letter to her mother and in due time came the expected invitation. At first Marian was too overjoyed for words: then she thought of Aunt Amelia and hope left her countenance. "I know what I will do," she said at last, "I will ask Miss Smith to write to Uncle George. Maybe then he will let me go. Nobody knows how much I want to see your mother."

Florence laughed. "I think I do," she said. "I have told my mother how you worship her miniature. I shouldn't be surprised to come in some day and find you on your knees before it. My mother is pretty and she is lovely and kind, but I don't see how anybody could care so much for her picture. Most of the girls just rave over brother, but you don't look at him. Just wait until you see him, Marian. I'll teach him to call you sister. He says 'Ta' for sister."

"Oh, I wish you would," said Marian, "I love babies and I never was anybody's sister of course. He is just as cunning as he can be. I am going now to ask Miss Smith to

write to Uncle George. She can get him to say yes if anybody can."

Miss Smith wrote and rewrote the letter, then waited for an answer with even less patience than Marian. At last it came, in Aunt Amelia's handwriting. Marian's heart sank when she saw the envelope. Her fears were well founded. Aunt Amelia was surprised to find that Marian knew no better than to trouble Miss Smith as she had. She might have known that Uncle George would not approve of her going to a city the size of Chicago to pass the holidays with strangers. Miss Smith, Dolly and Florence were indignant. Even Janey did some unselfish sputtering.

"Anything's better than going home," Marian reasoned at last, "and what's the use of crying about what you can't help. I ought to be glad it isn't June."

As a matter of fact, the holidays passed pleasantly for Marian in the big deserted house. The matron and the teachers who were left did everything in their power to please the child, and on Christmas Day the

postman left her more gifts than she had ever received before. There were no potatoes in her stocking that year. During the holidays, Marian kept the photograph of her own mother beside the miniatures, and as the days went by she became convinced that her mother and Florence Weston's mother looked much alike.

"My mother is prettier," she said aloud the last day of the old year, "but she is dead and as long as I live I never can see her. Perhaps I may see this other mother and perhaps she may love me. I shall have to put my picture away because it will get faded and spoiled, and I think I will pretend that Florence Weston's mother is my mother. Then I won't feel so lonesome. I never thought of pretending to have a mother before."

When Florence returned after the holidays, she was unable to account for the change in Marian. The child was radiantly happy. Tears no longer filled her eyes when she gazed too intently upon the miniatures. Instead, she smiled back at the faces and some-

times waved her hand to them when she left the room. How could Florence dream that Marian had taken the little brothers, the sister and the mother for her own.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW MARIAN CROSSED THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

June sent her messengers early. Every blade of grass that pushed its way through the brown earth, every bursting lilac bud or ambitious maple, spoke to Marian of June. Returning birds warbled the story and the world rejoiced. Teachers and pupils alike talked of June until it seemed to Marian that all nature and educational institutions had but one object, and that was to welcome June. She dreaded it. June meant Aunt Amelia and the end of all happiness. Yet Marian was only one. Ninety-nine other girls were looking eagerly forward to the close of school. They talked of it everywhere and at all hours.

It was the one subject of conversation in which Marian had no share, one joy beyond her grasp. Try hard as she would, Marian couldn't pretend to be glad she was going

home. That was a game for which she felt no enthusiasm. The mother, the little sister and the baby brothers in the golden frames would soon be gone, and gone forever. "We're all going back West just as soon as school closes," Florence had told her. "Next winter we will be home."

Nor was that all that Florence told Marian. She pictured the beautiful home in the West in the midst of her father's broad lands. She described her room, all sunshine and comfort, and the great house echoing with music and laughter. She told Marian of the gardens and the stables, of the horses, ponies and many pets. She described the river and the hills and the mountain peaks beyond. Florence almost forgot the presence of her wide eyed roommate in telling of the holiday celebrations at home and of the wondrous glory of the annual Christmas tree. Best of all, Florence spoke tenderly of her mother and her voice grew tender in speaking of the woman who never scolded but was always gentle and kind; the beautiful mother with the bright, gold hair. Florence had so much to say about

the little sister, brother and the baby, that Marian felt as if she knew them all.

Thus it was that Florence Weston was going home and Marian Lee was returning to Aunt Amelia. Miss Smith understood all about it and it grieved her. She had seen Aunt Amelia and that was enough. She didn't wonder that Marian's eyes grew sad and wistful as the days lengthened. At last Miss Virginia Smith thought of a way to win smiles from Marian. The botany class had been offered a prize. A railroad president, interested in the school had promised ten dollars in gold to the member of the botany class who made the best herbarium. Marian might not win the prize, but it would give her pleasure to try. She would have something more agreeable to think of than Aunt Amelia.

It was with some difficulty that Miss Smith obtained permission from the principal for Marian to enter the class, and but for the experience in the country school, the objection that Marian was too young would have barred her out. Miss Smith was right. Marian was delighted and for hours at a time Aunt Amelia

vanished from her thoughts. The members of the botany class were surprised that such a little girl learned hard lessons so easily, but Miss Smith only laughed.

In the beginning when the spring flowers came and every wayside bloom suggested a specimen, fully half the class intended to win the prize, Marian among the number. One by one the contestants dropped out as the weeks passed, leaving Marian with perhaps half a dozen rivals. At that early day, Miss Virginia Smith, who had no favorites, rejoiced secretly in the belief that Marian would win the prize. The commonest weed became beautiful beneath her hands and the number of specimens she found on the school grounds alone, exceeded all previous records. There was never so much as a leaf carelessly pressed among Marian's specimens. At last the child began to believe the prize would be hers and for the first time, going home lost its terrors.

If she won the prize, Uncle George would be proud of her and she would be happy. Finally Marian wrote to her uncle, telling him of the glories of commencement week.

She was to recite "The Witch's Daughter" at the entertainment, to take part in the operetta and to sing commencement morning with three other little girls. More than that, she was sure to win the prize, even her rivals admitted it. "Now Uncle George," the letter proceeded, "please be sure and come because I want somebody that is my relation to be here. Florence Weston says her father would come from Honolulu to see her win a prize, so please come, Uncle George, or maybe Florence will think nobody cares for me."

Marian was scarcely prepared to receive the answer that came to her letter from Aunt Amelia. Uncle George was too busy a man to take so long a journey for nothing. Aunt Amelia would come the day after commencement and pack Marian's trunk. So far as winning the prize was concerned, Uncle George expected Marian to win a prize if one were offered. That was a small way to show her gratitude for all that had been done for her. The child lost the letter. Janey C. Hopkins found and read it. Before sunset every one of the ninety-nine knew the contents. When

night settled down upon the school, one hundred girls were thinking of Aunt Amelia, one in tears, the ninety-nine with indignation.

The following morning Marian replied to her aunt's letter, begging to be allowed to go home with Dolly Russel and her mother, and assuring Aunt Amelia that she could pack her own trunk. Even that request was denied. Aunt Amelia would call for Marian the day after commencement and she wished to hear nothing further on the subject. She might have heard more had she not been beyond sound of the ninety-nine voices. Marian was too crushed for words. That is, she was crushed for a day. Her spirits revived as commencement week drew near and Miss Smith and the ninety-nine did so much to make her forget everything unpleasant. Marian couldn't understand why the girls were so kind nor why Janey C. Hopkins took a sudden interest in her happiness. The Sunday before commencement Marian wore Janey's prettiest gown to church. It was rather large for Marian but neither she nor Janey found that an objection. Miss Smith

approved and Sunday was a bright day for Aunt Amelia's little niece.

Monday, Dolly Russel's mother came and thanks to her, Marian appeared in no more garments that had disgraced the hooks in her closet. She danced through the halls in the daintiest of Dolly's belongings, and was happy as Mrs. Russel wished her to be.

Every hour brought new guests and in the excitement of meeting nearly all the friends of the ninety-nine and being kissed and petted by ever so many mothers, Marian forgot Aunt Amelia. Tuesday evening at the entertainment she did her part well and was so enthusiastically applauded, her cheeks grew red as the sash she wore, and that is saying a great deal, as Dolly's sash was a bright scarlet, the envy of the ninety-nine.

Florence Weston's father and mother were present at the entertainment, but Marian looked for them in vain. "They saw you just the same," Florence insisted when she and Marian were undressing that night, "and mamma said if it hadn't been so late she would have come up to our room to-night,

but she thought they had better get back to the hotel and you and I must settle down as quickly as we can. I can hardly keep my eyes open." Florence fell asleep with a smile upon her face. Marian's pillow was wet with tears before she drifted into troubled dreams of Aunt Amelia.

"Isn't it too bad!" exclaimed Florence the next morning. "They are going to present the prize in the dining-room at breakfast and my father and mother won't be up here until time for the exercises in the chapel. I wanted them to see you get the prize. I'm so disappointed. Never mind, though, you will see mamma all the afternoon, because she is going to pack my things. We leave to-morrow. I am going down-town with papa and mamma when we get through packing and stay all night. You will have the room all to yourself. What? are you crying, Marian? Why, I'll come back in the morning and see you before I go. I wouldn't cry if I were you!"

It was easy enough for a girl who had every earthly blessing to talk cheerfully to a weary little pilgrim.

Marian experienced the bitterest moment of her life when the prize was presented in the dining-room. There were many fathers and mothers there, and other relatives of the ninety-nine who joined in cheering the little victor. Yet Marian wept and would not be comforted. Even Miss Smith had no influence. In spite of the sympathetic arms that gathered her in, Marian felt utterly forsaken. She had won the prize, but what could it mean to a motherless, fatherless, almost homeless child? After breakfast, Marian, slipping away from Miss Smith and the friendly strangers, sought a deserted music room on the fourth floor where she cried until her courage returned: until hope banished tears. Perhaps Uncle George would be pleased after all.

"Where have you been?" demanded Florence when Marian returned to her room. "I have hunted for you everywhere. What a little goose you were to cry in the dining-room. Why, your eyes are red yet."

The only answer was a laugh as Marian bathed her tear-stained face.

"I want you to look pretty when mamma

sees you," continued Florence, "so don't you dare be silly again."

In spite of the warning, Marian was obliged to seek the obscurity of the fourth floor music room later in the day, before she thought of another refuge—Miss Smith's room. The sight of so many happy girls with their mothers was more than she could endure and Miss Smith understood. Even the thought of seeing Florence Weston's mother was a troubled one, for alas! she couldn't beg to go with the woman as she once did in the Little Pilgrims' Home.

When the child was sure that Florence and her mother were gone and while Miss Smith was busy in the office, she returned to her room. "The trunks are here yet," observed Marian, "but may be they won't send for them until morning," and utterly worn out by the day's excitement, the child threw herself upon the bed and sobbed in an abandonment of grief.

Half an hour later the door was opened by a woman who closed it softly when she saw Marian. "Poor little dear," she whispered,

and bending over the sleeping child, kissed her. Marian was dreaming of her mother.

"Poor little dear," repeated the woman, and kissed her again. That kiss roused the child. Opening her eyes, she threw her arms around the woman's neck, exclaiming wildly,

"My mother, oh, my mother!"

"But I am not your mother, dear," remonstrated the woman, trying to release herself from the clinging arms. "I am Florence Weston's mother. I have come for her little satchel that we forgot. Cuddle down, dear, and go to sleep again."

At that, Marian seemed to realize her mistake and cried so pitifully, Florence Weston's mother took her in her arms and sitting in a low rocker held Marian and tried to quiet her.

The door opened and Florence entered. "Why mamma, what is the matter?" she began, but without waiting for a reply, she was gone, returning in a moment with her father. "Now what is the matter with poor Marian?" she repeated.

"Nothing," explained Marian, "only everything."

"She thought I was her mother, Florence, the poor little girl; there, there, dear, don't cry. She was only half awake and she says I look like her mother's picture."

"You do, you look just like the picture," sobbed Marian.

"What picture?" asked the man; "this child is the image of brother. What picture, I say?"

"Oh, she means mamma's miniature," said Florence.

"I don't mean the miniature," Marian interrupted, "I mean my own mother's picture," and the child, kneeling before her small trunk quickly found the photograph of her father and mother. "There! doesn't she look like my mother?"

There was a moment of breathless silence as Florence Weston's father and mother gazed at the small card. The woman was the first to speak.

"Why, Richard Lee!" she exclaimed. "That must be a photograph of you!"

"It is," was the reply, "it is a picture of me and of my dead wife, but the baby died too."

"Well, I didn't die," cried Marian. "I was two months old when my father went away, and when my mother died, the folks wrote to the place where my father was the last time they knew anything about him, and I s'pose they told him I was dead, but I wasn't, and that's my mother. Uncle George knows it——"

"Uncle George, my brother George," for a moment it was the man who seemed to be dreaming. Then a light broke over his face as he snatched Marian and said, "Why, little girl, you are my child."

"And my mother will be your mother," Florence put in, "so what are you and mamma crying about now?"

"Didn't you ever hear," said Marian, smiling through her tears, "that sometimes folks cry for joy?"

It was unnecessary for Aunt Amelia to take the long journey. Marian's father telegraphed for Uncle George who arrived the next day with papers Marian knew nothing about, proving beyond question the identity of the child.

The little girl couldn't understand the silent greeting between the brothers, nor why Uncle George was so deeply affected when she talked of his kindness to her and the many happy days she thanked him for since he found her in the Little Pilgrims' Home. Neither could she understand what her father meant when he spoke of a debt of gratitude too deep for words.

Marian only knew that unpleasant memories slipped away like a dream when Uncle George left her with her father and mother: when he smiled and told her he was glad she was going home.

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